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理不尽な孫の手

無職転生

異世界行ったら
本気だす



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Mushoku Tensei

– Isekai Ittara Honki Dasu –

- Volume 15 -

Young Man Period

~ Summoning Chapter ~

Author:

Rifujinna Magonote

Artist:

Shirotaka

[Translated by: Baka-Tsuki]



アトーフェラトーフェ

シルヴァリル

ヘルギウス

ルーデウス

ナナホシ

キシリカ

人物紹介

「オレが不死魔王

アトーフエラトーフエ・ライバツクだ！」



CHAPTER 1

FLOATING CITADEL

Part 1

Half a day's walk from Magic City Sharia, not even an hour by horse, there lies a city ruin.

Or rather, what remains of a castle.

Great columns lie flat on the ground, stone slates scatter about.

This must be how the Parthenon would look after further deterioration.

It must have been a sight to behold once upon a time.

It gives the impression of a relic of history.

"What's left of the Scotts Castle, a relic from when mankind battled Laplace. It was said that thousands came to defend against the Demon invasion. In the end, all was for naught, and it was captured."

Explains the beautiful girl with golden braided hair besides me.

Graceful exterior, clad in expensive travel wear, a charismatic figure obvious even from afar.

Indeed, the one and only Ariel Anemoi Asura.

"..."

Was that explanation for me?

With that in mind, I glanced around me.

Luke and Sylphy stand not far behind.

A little further back, Roxy, Zanoba, Cliff and Elinalise.

Nanahoshi ahead.

Ariel looks towards me, there's no one between us.

"Ariel-sama sure knows her stuff."

It would be rude to ignore her.

With that in mind I answered. Ariel gently smiled in response.

"Folktales of this area often mention this topic."

"Are you interested in folktales?"

"To develop relationships with the aristocracy of the area, that is also necessary."

Ariel explains as a matter of fact.

Memorize local history in order to befriend the local aristocracy.

She has it tough.

"But coming to a place like this, can we really reach Perugius-sama from here?"

"To be honest, I don't really know what we do next, but..."

I look towards Nanahoshi in front of us.

Carrying a heavy backpack, moving unimpeded by the rubble around us, she leads looking straight ahead.

She told us to just follow along, but can we really get there from here?

From what I can recall, her notes don't feature a Teleport Magic Circle in this location.

"I'm more worried that having so many people tagging along would be a bother."

Hearing what I said, Ariel laughs out loud.

"Rudeus-sama sure worries over the strangest things. Even if he isn't the king of a country, he's still called [King], a true hero! A few guests like us shouldn't be a bother."

"If you say so..."

I glance behind us.

Me, Nanahoshi, Ariel, Sylphy, Luke, Roxy, Zanoba, Cliff, and Elinalise.

9 in total.

I thought it's a bit too much, but from a royal perspective, that should be nothing.

For royalty, guests come in tens, just us few can't count for much.

By the way, Norn refused politely because of school work.

Maybe she's worried about her promise to not slack off on her sword training and studies after joining the student council.

Well, if I really brought her along, then I'd have to bring Aisha too. This works just as well.

"Perugius-sama may be living the quiet life, but after the Laplace campaign he spent some time as a guest of Asura Kingdom, as an equal of King Asura. He would bring an entourage numbering in the tens or hundreds to the royal palace. Someone of his stature won't be troubled by a mere 9 guests."

"Ah, I see."

Ariel's charismatic voice is pleasing to the ear.

Anyone would be bothered to have guests arrive unannounced, but hearing this from Ariel, maybe it isn't that big of a deal.

"... If he got tired of the court life, maybe he got tired of guests too."

"Maybe. But if that's really the case, then Nanahoshi-sama probably won't allow me to come along."

"I don't think Nanahoshi is the kind of person that worries over these things."

Speaking of that, I recall how Ariel ended up coming along.

Back then, hearing Nanahoshi mention Perugius, I couldn't contain my excitement.

The Armored Dragon King Perugius.

Even I have heard of that name before.

Not long after I came to this world, I read about him in a book.

400 years ago, a hero of the Laplace Campaign.

In it writes that he controls 12 familiars, rebuilt the ancient sky castle, and challenged Laplace with his companions.

After Laplace was sealed, as tribute to his exploits, the new era is named "Armored Dragon era" in his honor.

Armored Dragon King Perugius did not become head of a country, rather he sits afloat Sky Castle [Chaos Breaker] and travels the world.

Of course I'm excited to meet someone of that caliber.

No matter what, a castle in the sky!

Laputa ho!^[1]

I ought to be busy with research and child-rearing.

But I still want to go.

Even if only once.

I'm sorry, Lucy. Papa's curiosity got the better of him.

But Papa will definitely bring something back for you!

Sylphy's concerns were the complete opposite of my selfish self.

She asked Nanahoshi.

"Can Ariel-sama come along as well?"

"Ariel?"

Nanahoshi looked troubled.

Ariel has solicited her on many occasions.

Nanahoshi wields tremendous influence within Asura and Ranoa kingdoms, so Ariel has long sought to bring her into her circle.

But Nanahoshi wants to avoid entanglement with this world. That would just be a bother.

"Yes. Perugius-sama may have lived in seclusion for a long time, but his name still holds pivotal weight within Asura court. Ariel-sama, she... looking towards the future, I'm sure she would want to meet someone like him."

Ariel has connections all over the place.

All preparations to one day take over the Asura throne.

It would be a tough fight, possibly an impossible one.

I don't know Ariel's plans after she graduates in a year.

Will she continue to gather strength here, or will she head back to Asura for a fight to the death?

As long as it doesn't endanger my family, I'd give her a hand.

But her position there is still uncertain.

To be honest, I don't want to involve myself in that mess either, but I do genuinely want to offer support for my wife.

However, Ariel doesn't seem to plan to bring Sylphy back to Asura Kingdom.

Sylphy has a kid now, so I doubt she plans to leave Lucy behind for something so risky. Still, I doubt she's ready for goodbyes yet, and has been giving her all for Ariel's sake right now.

This is probably one of those cases.

In the battle for the throne, connections are everything.

Particularly, if she can obtain the backing of Armored Dragon King Perugius, hero of Asura Kingdom, then her path for the throne would surely be easier.

"Well, I have been in your care. That's fine, bring her."

I thought for sure that she would refuse, but Nanahoshi okays it.
Afterwards I heard that while I was away, Nanahoshi got a lot of help from Sylphy.
Bringing her meals, help with shopping, casting detoxification magic when she got sick.
Although she stopped after Lucy was born, she used to come by often for baths.

"Really? Thank you very much! I'm sure Ariel-sama would be pleased..."

Sylphy clenched her fist and brightly smiled.

As a result, Ariel and Luke joined the party as well.
Sylphy said Ariel was unusually excited about this.
No matter their station, everyone reacts the same way when meeting someone so famous face to face.
I'm excited too.
He's the real deal, a genuine hero.
Hopefully he's easy to get along with.

... Speaking of which, I just remembered.
A long time ago, I did meet one of Perugius's subordinates.
Just before the Metastasis Event.
I met with Arumanfi of the Bright.
If I recall, back then he suspected me as the person behind the Metastasis Event and attacked me.
Ghyslaine was able to talk him down. He doesn't seem like a bad person, but he did try to kill me once.
That makes me nervous.
No, no reason for the master to be dangerous just because his subordinate was.
Besides, if Perugius-sama had detected the Metastasis event and wanted to stop it...
Then he deserves praise for acting on his own initiative.
But if I was killed back then...
Forget it, what's done is done.
Water under the bridge.
For our initial greetings, I shouldn't be looking to fight.
Forgive and forget.

"We're here."

While I was worrying over these things, Nanahoshi stopped at the center of the ruins.

Middle of nowhere.

Despite what I think, if look carefully, on the ground rests a stool-sized stone.

A stone monument.

Monument of "Seven Great Major Powers."

The faint light that extrudes from it hints at the terrifying powers of the names engraved there.

Seems like these are everywhere, even here.

"Now what?"

"We call him."

Having said that, Nanahoshi drops her baggage and takes out a golden flute.

Not a finger hole on it, so more properly a whistle.

Nanahoshi placed it against her lips and blew.

Fuu-!

No whistling.

Just the sound of blowing air.

Maybe a dog whistle?

"No sound?"

Cliff exclaimed.

"Humans can't hear it. Just wait, he'll be here soon."

Having said that, Nanahoshi sat on a rock besides her.

A sound humans can't hear.

Yet it can reach Perugia.

That should be impossible in normal circumstances.

In other word, that flute is a magic item too.

"Cliff."

Suddenly Elinalise yelled at Cliff with a straight face.

"What is it?"

"While we're still here I have to say this. Where we're going isn't a place to joke around at. Remember to watch your mouth."

"... I get it. I am not a kid anymore."

Cliff pouts like a kid that just got lectured.

Then Elinalise presses herself against Cliff, whispering into his ears.

Cliff seems to have calmed down, probably some sweet nothings as an apology.

"What sorts of statues will a castle in the sky have, I can't wait to find out!"

Zanoba is his usual self.

Once set to visit Perugius, he immediately started to say [Well, let's bring some of our results to show Perugius-sama] and packed up the Ruijerd that I made and other figures into his luggage.

I doubt there's an opportunity, but he probably wants to do some promoting like I once did with Badigadi.

Truly enthusiastic for his work.

By the way, Ginger isn't here.

Zanoba ordered her to protect my family.

Even though Ginger obviously wanted to come along.

Well, for me the more protection for them the better, so one more doesn't hurt.

But it's not like I'm taking a long leave of absence either.

"Don't always push your hobbies onto others. After all, that guy is over 400 years old already."

"Hahaha, isn't Badigadi-sama even older? The older they are, the more they can appreciate the craftsmanship of Shisho's figures."

"Oh... Really?"

Far in the sky, something is shining.

"He's here."

Just as Nanahoshi said.

He appears.

Literally, in a twinkle of an eye, he suddenly appears.

Golden hair, a buttoned-up, white outfit like a student's uniform.

Probably a handsome face hidden behind that yellow mask.
The mask in the shape of a fox.
A large dagger hangs down his waist.

"Arumanfi of the Bright, present."

Truly abrupt. Feels like he just materialized in the center of us.
I guess he flew?
At the speed of light, he flew all the way from the castle in the sky.
Just the way he showed up when the Fedoa Region disappeared.

"..."

Abruptly, Arumanfi turns towards me.
Does he remember me?
I'm scared he's going to attack me again.
Secretly I open my demon eye and grip my staff.

But Arumanfi doesn't seem to remember me.
Instead of me, he walks before Nanahoshi.

"...Today you've brought a lot of people."

Arumanfi looks around him, as he said to Nanahoshi
Nanahoshi said [Oh] as she nods.

"It's fine, right? As long as under 12 people."
"The number doesn't matter, however..."

Arumanfi looks towards Roxy.

"No Magic Race."
"Eh, W-why?"

Roxy looks like a cat with water poured over it.

"In the Sky Castle, Magic Race are not allowed."
"I-is that so."

Roxy sunken, her shoulders droop.

Perugius waged battles against the Magic Race during the Laplace Campaign.
Can't be helped if some prejudice towards the Magic Race remains.

"No matter what?"

"Perugius-sama is kind, but he hates the Magic Race."

I have forgotten, since this area doesn't share much prejudice against the Magic Race, but hatred towards them still runs deep.

Perugius may be a person of legends, but he's also a witness to war.

Perhaps like Ruijerd, he has memories that can't be erased of those battles.

But only Roxy is left out, I feel bad for her.

"No, it's fine. In that case, I'll stay home. Since I was a little scared of meeting Perugius... -sama as well. I still have school work to do, so just as well."

Her shoulders drooped, a flat refusal.

But looking carefully, I see some lingering regrets.

She turns to me with a forced smile.

"Rudi, I'll take care of the house."

"Okay. I'll make sure to bring some gifts back..."

"Don't worry about that, just a kiss is fine."

That, I do immediately.

A whole ten seconds, Roxy's heart races, my ATOMIC BAZOOKA engaged, its nuclear warhead loaded, fire! ^[2]

"Thanks."

"No, the pleasure is mine."

Still a little upset, but with her face red, Roxy backs away with a slight smile.

I will shower her with affection when I get back.

"Done, are you?"

Arumanfi approaches us as Roxy and I say our goodbyes.

He hands me something like a baton.

I turn around to look, seems everyone else is holding a similar one.

"Hold this."

I take it and follow his instructions.

A golden baton around 20 CM in length, some intricate patterns engraved on its surface.

Magic crystals nested on top and bottom.

Another magic item?

"Now what?"

"Just hold still. Perugius-sama will use teleportation magic to bring you to the Sky Castle."

Ah, teleportation magic, so this is a magic item for that.

So this exists as well.

How convenient.

Eh? I thought humans cannot be summoned..?

No, this is teleportation.

What's the difference?

Use this baton to teleport over to the Sky Castle, is that how it works?

"Ah, what about the return trip?"

"The way back, something similar."

Arumanfi replies as a matter of fact.

In that case, then it can be done.

If I have to walk home, by then Lucy would have grown up already.

I feel reassured with that said.

"Everyone got it? Hold on tight."

Nanahoshi nods after checking up on everyone and confirms with Arumanfi.

"Just a moment."

Arumanfi nods and disappears in the light.

Reporting back to Perugius that the preparations are ready, I suppose.

"... This is kind of exciting."

"Indeed."

Ariel and Sylphy banter.

It is kind of exciting.

A wry smile from Luke.

Say, with teleportation.

If it fails, where would we end up?

Kind of scary.

Even someone as powerful as Perugia could make a mistake. After all, he's only human.

"...Oh?"

While I was thinking about it, I suddenly feel heat coming from the baton.

Feels like my palm is getting sucked in by it.

What happens if I let go right now?

Would it fail?

But for this to happen all of a sudden, some people would let go by instinct right...

"Eh?"

I look around.

Everyone's gone.

No, I caught the moment when Sylphy disappeared.

Only Roxy and I remain.

Eh?

They left without me?

At that moment, my conscious fell into the baton.

Part 2

When I came to, I find myself flying in a completely white world.

Nothing at all, a completely white space.

I feel myself flying towards something in the distance.

Like a fish hooked on a powered fishing pole.

Some distance before me I see Sylphy reeling towards the same location.

So that's what being summoned feels like.

Speaking of which, this space.

Feels like I have been here before.

Ah, when was it?

Oh yeah, Hitogami.

It feels a little vague, but this looks just like when Hitogami appears in my dreams.

The only exception, is my body isn't from my previous life.

Like running in a marathon, I keep flying that way.

Then, light appears before me.

The light outlines a sophisticated magic circle, which sucked me in.

Part 3

Returning to my senses, I stand grounded.

"Ha!"

Like waking up from a dream.

Did I lose consciousness?

No, not at all.

I really was flying through a space of nothingness.

"So this is... Perugia's teleportation magic."

What a strange sensation.

But, I have experienced something similar once before.

The Metastasis Event.

Back then, it felt like flying in the air as well.

Well, there's one difference from then.

A sense of assurance.

If the Metastasis Event is jumping out of a speeding car, then this is like riding a taxi.

A feeling of safe travels.

"... This feels familiar."

Sylphy murmurs softly.

Ah, she felt it as well.

"Yeah."

I look around as I replied.

Ariel, Luke, Zanoba, Cliff, Elinalise, and Nanahoshi.

Everyone but Nanahoshi and Elinalise look baffled.

Regardless, everyone arrived safely.

"What an incredibly large magic circle..."

Cliff, speaking to himself.

Finally I noticed my surroundings.
We stand above a giant magic circle.
Maybe 10 meters radius.
Carved directly from a marble-like floor, with water gushing throughout.
Faint light shone from the water. Some kind of magic.
The water aside, I have seen these lights before, exactly the same as when we teleported to the Begaritto Continent.
In other words, another type of Teleport Magic Circle.
This baton and that water magic circle. Looks like teleportation magic requires all sort of preparations.

"Wow..."

Stealing my attention, far behind the magic circle...

Sits a gigantic castle.
Taller than a 50 floor skyscraper.
Wide too, not lanky, but full-frame and sturdy.
Not unlike a movie backdrop without going in to check.

Even with memory from my past life, I can't recall a building of this size.
Like building a castle atop of the Tokyo Dome.

This is the castle in the sky?
Although I saw it from the ground before... to think it's in reality that huge.
No, of course, considering the presence of it just from a distance.

"Incredible, it's even bigger than the Asura palace!"

Hearing Sylphy's voice, I looked down.
In front of the castle is an equally large garden.
Trees of all kinds and flowers of all colors planted everywhere like a maze.
Before the garden a small river shining under the sun.
Even from afar, it's easy to see how manicured the garden is.

"R-Rudi... Look back."
"Oh?"

I turn back as Sylphy instructed.

Out of the magic circle, behind a golden fence.
A sea of clouds extends in every direction.

"Clouds..."

In my past life, I rode an airplane once during elementary school.
What lies before us looks just like that.
But, to see it with my own eyes, without a window obstructing us, that's a first for me too.
Why is watching the clouds from above such a moving experience?
This must be why mountaineers climb mountains.

"..."

Cliff and Luke were stunned, their mouth open ear to ear.
Ariel too, her eyes wide, looking towards the open sky.
A scenery that takes your breath away.

It can't be helped.
No airplanes in this world, no concept of mountain climbing either.
No chance of ever experiencing a scene like this.
Suddenly, Sylphy grabs me by the hem.

"Ugh... I don't do well in high places."

I look down, Sylphy's legs have given out.
If you knew, why did you come in the first place?
Such a hard worker.
Well, if she couldn't walk anymore, then I can carry her over.

"Sky Castle [Chaos Breaker], is everyone enjoying the view?"

Suddenly an unfamiliar voice rang behind us.
I look back in a hurry, a female figure stands before us.
Like a statue, just outside of the magic circle.

Her near-white, golden hair drapes down her shoulders, wearing a white mask of a bird.
Can't be sure if she's human or not, but her figure looks female.

She wears a gown-like white robe, holding a magic staff.
The staff carries a magic stone, opaque and dark.
Without a doubt, a particularly expensive one.
In my opinion, not everything is about money, but that's definitely something expensive.
Even more expensive than my precious staff.
What's exceptional about her isn't her gown or staff.
But what's behind her.

Startlingly, from her back grows a pair of jet black wings.

"A Heaven Race...?"

That pair of wings hold an overwhelming presence.
Despite that, her person is that of eerie calm, hiding her presence.
A female that gives out a strange sensation.

She quickly bows her head once we exchanged a glance.

"Everyone, it's an honor for you to come."

How well mannered.
Even with someone as ignorant of etiquette as me can tell that her movement is well practiced.

"I am the first Familiar of Perugius-sama, Sylvaril of the Void. Please allow me to lead everyone towards Sky Castle [Chaos Breaker]."

"Guardian Knight of the Second Princess of Asura Kingdom, Luke Notos Greyrat at your service. It's an honor to be at your presence. I'll be in your care."

Luke returns the greeting.
He stands before Ariel, flashing a gentle smile towards the woman named Sylvaril.
Sylvaril isn't particularly tall or short, but she should still be within his strike range.
No, no.
That's not what he means, this is just courtesy.

"This is the Second Princess of Asura Kingdom, Ariel Anemoi Asura."

With Luke's introduction, holding her skirt, Ariel curtsy.

Also a practiced motion.
Not something I could learn.

Afterwards, each of us make our self introduction.
Cliff and Zanoba both made their greetings gracefully.
Perhaps among the people here, I know the least of etiquette.

"Oh, everyone, it's an honor."

Although her thoughts are opaque, her actions have been courteous to us.
Finally, Nanahoshi answers her casually.

"Been a while, Sylvaril-san."

"Em, you too, Nanahoshi-sama... are you feeling well?"

"Just a slight discomfort."

Only a short conversation between them.
But they seem comfortable with each other, so it's probably fine.

"Then, this way please."

Sylvaril turns and starts walking forward, without a sound.
Her head almost without any bobble. With her legs covered in the gown, she moves like a ghost.
Nanahoshi follows behind without any concern.

We exchange a glance and follow.

Part 4

Sylvaril advances straight through the garden.

In front a huge set of doors.

Rather than doors, they're more like the Arc de Triomphe.

Standing in front of it, Zanoba says with something with a hushed awe.

"Wow, what an incredible relief."

Although uninterested in everything but figures, Zanoba still recognizes art when he sees it. Perhaps there are some things in common here.

I could not tell at all whether these engravings are good or bad. But if Zanoba says so, then it must be quite outstanding.

After all, something that's not a figure managed to take his breath away.

Paying more attention now that he mentioned it, they are indeed quite beautiful.

A doorway like the Arc de Triomphe, even the interior is covered in intricate relief.

No matter what, with all these delicate patterns all over, you can't help but look up.

Walking and looking, I heard Sylvaril explaining from the front.

"This arc is handmade by the Dark Dragon King Maxwell. Maxwell-sama specializes in this sort of craftsmanship and magical construction. His extant work is also available within the palace of Holy Milis Kingdom-"

"Ohhhhhh!"

Zanoba suddenly shouts.

Sylvaril turns around in confusion.

"Is there a problem?"

"W-well! Where is Maxwell-sama presently?"

Zanoba stares excitedly at a particular corner. He's trembling.

What's over there?

But I really have no idea what's he looking at.

"Dark Dragon King Maxwell-sama wanders the world. If he's still alive, he is probably still wandering somewhere."

"I-is that so, such an amazing person... yet.. yet.."

Zanoba can't contain his excitement.

Well, Zanoba never could contain his excitement.

"May we continue?"

"Oh, oh yeah. I'm very sorry. It was just too beautiful to pass up."

"Is that so. Once you enter the castle, there're plenty other outstanding works too. We'll be happy to satisfy you."

Finishing in a gentle tone, Sylvaril moves ahead.

She's probably smiling under that mask.

At the same time, Zanoba rushes over besides me.

He shoves his mouth near my ear and quietly asks.

"Shisho, did you see?"

"Eh?"

"Huge discovery! Fortunate that we came. I really need to properly thank Nanahoshi for this."



A huge discovery?

Seems like Zanoba and I pay attention differently.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't figure out what you discovered. Can you properly explain it to me when we have the time?"

Zanoba looks visibly disappointed, hearing that from me.

"What? Shisho didn't notice?"

Zanoba retreats back a few steps.

I'm sorry! I'm not as good as you when it come to appraising this stuff.

"Mm?"

As we pass the door, I noticed some white particles coming from Sylphy before me.

"Eh?"

Sylvaril stops, turning around to look at Sylphy and me.

Although hidden behind her mask, I can feel the mood shift beneath it suddenly.

Rather, maybe it's us.

"I-is there a problem?"

I hesitantly ask Sylvaril.

Last time Arumanfi abruptly attacked.

I don't want that to happen again.

If that's possible, then I really hope we can talk it out and avoid a misunderstanding. Even if it isn't, and something bad really does happen, at least we should retreat as soon as possible.

Although I have some questions for Perugius, but I'd rather go home rather than look for a fight.

"No. It's nothing particular. There are quite a few people like you on earth."

"Is that so?"

What does she mean by people like us?

Makes me nervous.

Don't tell me we would be trapped as soon we enter the castle?

I should keep my demon eye open.

"However, may I ask you two something?"

"Go ahead."

"Hitogami, have you heard that name before?"

I tried hard to not show a reaction.

Hitogami.

Hearing that suddenly reminds me of Orsted.

Last time, Orsted asked the same question. When I answered, he nearly killed me.

I don't want that to happen again.

I hesitated.

If I answer truthfully, it'd spell trouble if she turn hostile.

Indeed, Hitogami has been playing me in the palm of his hands, and he has helped me.

I never planned to be his underling, but I also realize that I'm becoming that sort of thing.

"No, not at all."

Sylphy shakes her head while I hesitate.

"Then, when you hear that name, do you feel an unspeakable anger or murderous intent?"

Sylphy shakes her head in silence.

I as well.

But I can sense what that question is about.

Orsted gives out that kind of feeling.

To know such things, maybe Orsted and Perugius are rivals?

I'm not sure.

"In that case, then everything is fine."

With that said, Sylvaril starts to walk again.

Part 5

The Sky Castle [Chaos Breaker].

Despite its name, the only word that can properly describe it is stunning.

I can't imagine how such a huge structure was constructed.

However, despite its size, every corner has been decorated with exquisite statues, and every statue made meticulously by master craftsmen.

Not just on the outside.

The inside is covered by golden embroidered carpeting, paintings line the walls, and each side is decorated with expensive artwork and sculptures.

Zanoba will speak nonstop, looking at this and that, [This sculpture is obviously out of the Ganon school. Could it be by the master himself?] [The original rider statue? To see this in person, what an honor!] He looks truly happy.

Originally Sylvaril and Ariel would respond, but they soon got worn down by him and simply smile wearily.

Usually there would be a second bothersome person.

Yet when I look at Cliff, he looks painfully tense.

His eyes are wide, but he's keeping his mouth shut unless being asked otherwise.

Elinalise besides him, holding his hand like a mom and keeping him moving along.

Well, this is fine. If those two start chattering it'd be rather noisy.

"The audience room is just before us."

At the end of the hallway, Sylvaril stops before a pair of doors.

A heavy door, dotted with silver, with a dragon painted on each side.

All in all, it took almost an hour for us to reach here from the magic circle.

Such a large place is kind of a pain too.

A segway would be nice.

"Although Perugius is generous, please observe proper etiquette."

Having said that, Sylvaril places a hand on the door.

No knocking?

"Excuse us, but we're still in our travel wear! Wouldn't that be inappropriate?"

Ariel hurriedly asks.

Now that she mentions it, don't they usually bring the guests to the reception room first in these situations?

Change into proper formal wear, get everything set before initial greetings.

I recall doing that when meeting with King Shirone.

But I didn't have any formal wear of sorts, so I ended up wearing my old shabby robes like usual.

Oh no, I never thought about this before, so that was an audience.

I should have brought a formal wear.

"Perugius-sama doesn't care about the dress code. Rather, he really dislikes the old-fashion formalities at Asura Kingdom. In my opinion, rather than changing intentionally, keep what you have on, and you'll leave a better impression with master."

Hearing that, Ariel shut her mouth.

Maybe something happened back then.

Like, the reason Perugius left for the Sky Castle was that he got bullied by King Asura or something.

"Well, may we at least put aside our coats and luggage?"

"I understand, please come this way."

Hearing what amounted to begging from Ariel, Sylvaril consents and nods.

Walking away from the big door, she opens a room on the side.

Roughly the size of my bedroom.

Compared to the rest of the castle it's relatively small and plain, but even the table, cabinet, and clothing racks are items of high quality.

"Thank you very much."

"Perugius-sama is waiting. Please hurry."

With that said, Sylvaril closed the door.

Confirming that, Ariel removes her overcoat.

Luke immediately went over to take it from her, and Sylphy takes out a haircomb and begins to comb Ariel's hair.

At the same time, Zanoba put away his overcoat in the clothing rack and put on a new one to wear.

Elinalise busies herself inspecting Cliff's hair and outfit.

I dust off my outfit and straighten my shirt.

Nothing formal... What you wear isn't important, sincerity is.

Casual wear doesn't mean we can just wear whatever.

By the way, Nanahoshi isn't doing anything.

At most she just straightened her bangs.

Say, today she's in uniform too.

Does she really hate clothing from this world that much?

"All set."

Finally Sylphy removes her sunglasses. Everyone's ready to go.

All in all, no more than 10 minutes have passed.

Despite that, Ariel looks almost like a different person.

She has bearings to begin with, but now she just exudes elegance.

Perhaps as royalty, she has spent a long time honing the skills to become beautiful.

"Sorry for the wait."

"Oh. This way."

Sylvaril receives the signal from outside.

Like nothing happened, she heads back before the previous door.

Giant doors painted with dragons.

Behind it waits Perugius.

Realizing that, I start to feel nervous.

"Phew..."

Before the doors open, I heard Ariel taking a deep breath.

CHAPTER 2

AUDIENCE WITH PERUGIUS

Part 1

Seated on his throne, the man with an overwhelming oppressive presence.

Gleaming white hair.

Sanpaku eyes with golden pupils.

Nobility radiates from his entire body.

A king.

He is Armored Dragon King Perugius.

With a single glance my legs tremble.

I know the reason.

Because, Orsted looks like that man.

Never forget.

The white haired man that killed me.

No matter their hair or facial features or style of dress, Perugius and him differ.

But they feel the same.

Just like Orsted.

"Come forward."

Urged by Sylvaril, Nanahoshi steps forth.

Matching her, Ariel follows close behind.

I follow like I'm trying to hide behind them.

This is an enormous hall.

Tall ceilings, supported by tree-like pillars.

Looking up, light radiates down from above.

Luxurious, brilliant.

Plus, hanging from the walls are curtains of complex patterns.

Products from Asura to Holy Milis, from the common to the never before seen, a little bit of everything.

On each side of the red carpet under our feet, 11 men and women stand in attention.

"..."

They're all clad in white.
Each a different design, but all the same color.
All white.

Then there are the masks.
Everyone's wearing masks.
None of their masks are the same.
Some in form of animals.
One seems to be missing an eye, so the mask covers only the eye.
Another looks like the helmet from Robocop, like it was made out of the same mold.

They must be the famed 12 Familiars of Perugia.
Despite being Familiars, they all look humanoid.

Long ago, Arumanfi and Ghyslaine fought in a stalemate.
In other words, the twelve of them including Sylvaril have strength equal to that of a Sword King.
I really don't want to make enemies out of these people.
I really need to be careful with what I say from now on.

"Stop here."

Hearing Sylvaril say so, Nanahoshi stops.

"..."

A mere ten steps from the throne two levels above us.
Perugius observes us without saying a word.
Rather, observing me.
I can feel his line of sight.
Scary.

Sylvaril walks slowly next to Perugius, standing in attention to his right.
Sylvaril on the right, Arumanfi on his left.
Then, as if to surround us, 5 on each side.
Slowly, Perugius speaks.

"I am Armored Dragon King Perugius Dola."

Captain Dola!

No, no.

Nothing to do with Castle in the Sky.

"Long time no see, Perugius-sama. As promised, I have returned."

Nanahoshi bows.

How unusual to speak in honorifics.

Suddenly I realize that Ariel is also in a bow.
Luke and Sylphy both kneeling with one knee.
Hesitating briefly, I bow as I usually do.
A Japanese ojigi.

"Nanahoshi."

Perugius's voice sends a chill down my spine.
That voice is full of majesty and oppression.
I feel like a prey animal, frozen in terror, my heart still and my breath difficult.
Cold sweat starts streaming down.
Terrifying.
Truly the feeling of a king.

"You have returned. In other words, you found a clue on how to conduct summoning from another world?"

"Yes. However, I don't know if the results match your expectations."

"Results... Searching for knowledge is the fate of the Dragon Race."

Dragon Race, so he's from the Dragon Race.
I haven't noticed until now, but that makes sense.
Dragon God and the Armored Dragon King.
Neither of them are human, but rather Dragon Race.

They look similar because they're from the same race.

Nanahoshi responds to Perugia without hesitation.

Perugia doesn't seem to hold any animosity against Nanahoshi.

A courteous friendship.

He may live secluded in a castle like this, but I guess he isn't paranoid.

"I hope as promised, you'll teach me your knowledge of this world's summoning magic."

"Em, that's fine."

Looks like Nanahoshi and Perugia have an understanding.

Nanahoshi will research summoning from another world, and share the results with Perugia.

And in return, Perugia will teach her the essence behind this world's summoning magic.

Something like that.

"Speaking of which, you brought quite a group here. Why are they here?"

"Yes. They assist in my research. As reward, they wished to meet Perugia-sama."

"Oh."

Perugia sighs out of boredom.

Calling it a reward felt a little inappropriate, but it wasn't a lie.

"Pleased to meet you."

Ariel steps forward.

"I am Ariel Anemoi Asura, Second Princess of Asura Kingdom. It's an honor to finally meet you in person, your majesty."

"Ariel Anemoi Asura, huh?"

"Pleased to make your acquaintance."

Perugia sighs loudly.

"I'm aware. Refusing to admit defeat after losing an ugly fight for the Asura throne, going as far as trying to get everyone around you involved in the mud flinging, that stupid princess."

Luke raises his head.
But, Ariel looks unshaken.

"That's a bit harsh."

As expected of Ariel.
With a gentle smile, she maintains eye contact with Perugius.

"Coming here, you want to find out whether I'll lend you a hand?"
"No, I just want to witness the world famous hero in person."
"Your scheme is obvious, Ariel Anemoi Asura."

As always, Ariel's voice is full of charisma.
But looking closely, she doesn't look so good. Cold sweat beaded down her face.
Having her plan exposed, leaving a bad impression, her rhythm has been upset.
Seeing Ariel like this, Perugius smiles a little.
A smile for a scolded child.

"However, since you're here, that too is fate. Take the opportunity. I shall allow you to remain in my castle."
"T-thank you very much."

Ariel takes a bow and steps back.
Her anxiety eased, but did not completely disappear.

Part 2

"Next, and you?"

Perugius turns his attention to me after Ariel steps back.
As if my status was second only to Ariel.

Thinking of this, I sneaked a peek behind me.
Zanoba, Cliff, and Elinalise.
All kneeling on the floor.
Only Nanahoshi, Ariel, and I were left standing.

No wonder he has been staring at me.
I placed a hand on my chest, once more taking a bow.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Rudeus Greyrat."
"Rudeus Greyrat."

Perugius recites my name, chewing over it.

"Transporting you over here took quite a bit of effort."
"...?"

"To begin with, that teleportation magic isn't supposed to work on anyone with more magic."

Perugius explains unhappily.

"Your magic matches that of Laplace. If you seriously resist, even I can't teleport you."
"Is that so, I'm sorry for causing you trouble."

Laplace.
Sealed by Perugius 400 years ago, name of the Demon God.
Everyone mentions that name when evaluating my magic power.
I guess it's true.

"No matter. However, with that much power in your command, don't even think about using it inside this castle."
"Of course."

That feels like a warning shot.

No, he ought to give me a warning, just in case I go berserk.

Say, but why?

Why so vigilant towards me?

I have never been the kind to turn violent for no reason. I wouldn't go berserk if I have.

... Ah, is that still on his mind?

That during the Metastasis Event, Arumanfi suddenly tried to kill me.

Is he worried that I still hold a grudge over that?

So that's why. In other words, he wants me to let that pass.

"If it's about the Metastasis Event, that doesn't really bother me. So-"

"Metastasis Event? What do you mean?"

Perugius tilts his hand in confusion. Arumanfi suddenly teleports next to him.

Then, he whispered something in his ear.

"Ah, now that you mention it, I did hear that during the Metastasis Event, some Sword King was protecting a youth that was casting magic towards the sky. Are you him?"

So he forgot already.

Am I digging my own grave?

Just like said, I declare that I'm not really bothered by that.

But, I didn't do anything to offend them.

It should be fine?

"I also heard that someone damaged Orsted's hand, someone by the name of Rudeus Greyrat."

He even knows about that.

It's not like I really hurt him, it was barely a scratch.

If he knows that, does that mean Orsted and Perugius know each other? Or did he hear it from Nanahoshi?

No wait, Nanahoshi probably met the owner of this castle in the sky through Orsted too.

"People of your talent tend to grow overconfident. Don't grow arrogant just because you managed to hurt that Dragon God. Because, if you want a duel with yours truly, then prepare to die!"

As soon as he finishes, killing intent pours out from Perugius.

Come on.

I'm a little worried with how menacing he became.

I came here to collect intelligence on mother's illness. And with a little luck, maybe learn a little summoning magic.

Despite that, why is he so vigilant against me?

... Does he think that I somehow fought Orsted to a stalemate?

You're kidding me.

It was a one handed slaughter. I just sneaked a shot in.

Of the 12 Familiars present.

Although it's only what's written, but I still remember each of their abilities.

But reading about a character is different from fighting it.

Besides, numerical superiority matters in a fight.

Even with one-shot-kill zombies, it's over if there are too many of them.

And these are players that match up against Ghyslaine.

Who knows how strong Perugius is, probably not too shabby.

If we fought, I'm a dead man.

In summary, I have no reason to fight.

"Of course, I wouldn't do something as stupid as defying Perugius-sama."

"Good attitude. I like smart kids. Birds of a feather flock together. Put a few smart kids together, and they can push each other forward."

In this circumstance, smart kids are the ones that don't defy Perugius, I guess.

I don't think I'm particularly smart, but at least I know that much.

"Perugius-sama, this one here... with his enormous magic power, he contributed greatly to my research. He's not an enemy. So, can you be a little nicer?"

Nanahoshi intervenes.

As expected of Nanahoshi.

She's right.

Don't be so hostile, be nicer.

"Um."

Perugius nods to Nanahoshi's advice.

"Then I shall be a little nicer. Nanahoshi's comrade, what is your wish? Money? Power?"

Perugius asks, looking slightly bored.
So you're finally going to treat me as a guest now.
Why so harsh toward your first time guests?
Although I have been a little careless...

Well, forget it.
I should ask what I'm here for.

"Then, I have a question to ask."

"What is it?"

"About my mother's illness."

I began to explain the situation with Zenith.

Part 3

"I see."

After explaining Zenith's situation and syndromes, Perugia nods heavily.

"Indeed I have heard this happening before, ancient labyrinths using a captured person as its core. As a result, as the core, the person begins to change. Without an exception they lose their memory, but gain some mysterious power."

"Mysterious power?"

"Some call them cursed children, others call them miko, that kind of power."

A curse.

Zenith has been cursed.

A curse that prevents her from crying or laughing.

"Why does that happen?"

"Who knows. Supposedly, labyrinths are magical creatures created by the ancient ones, in their pursuit of paradise. It can evenly distribute magic from its core to its inhabitants. Those that live inside it are free from hunger and prosper. An ancient Labyrinth capturing a human, in order to increase that magic, isn't inconceivable."

Ancient one's paradise... freedom from hunger.

Speaking of which, monsters were everywhere in the Teleportation Labyrinth.

Especially those particularly gluttonous ones.

I had been wondering what they eat to survive, so that's why.

No, but Roxy said she starved inside the labyrinth.

So it really wasn't distributing magic power to everyone inside.

Or perhaps, monsters have some method of absorbing magic from thin air?

... Well, it doesn't matter what labyrinths are.

What's important is Zenith.

"Do you know of a way to cure mother?"

"I don't know any details, but..."

Perugia looks behind me as he speaks.

"A person that survived a similar circumstance, but healthy and living, wouldn't someone like her know more details?"

Perugius looks towards that girl with golden hair from the Long-Ear Tribe.
Elinalise slowly raises her head.

"Elinalise Dragonroad. I remember that 200 years ago I personally rescued you from the Bau Labyrinth."

"That's right."

"The long-eared girl with lost memory. We met only once. It has been a long time, have you forgotten I?"

"No, I still remember."

Elinalise looks apologetic towards me.

What's going on?

Elinalise has been through a similar experience?

200 years ago, rescued from a labyrinth?

Hold on, what's going on?

"Why did you remain silent? Coming here together, you two should be familiar, right?"

"That's..."

"You have personal experience. No one knows the situation better than you."

Hearing Perugius, Elinalise stands up nervously.
But finally, she gives a resolute reply.

"I never did regain my memory, but maybe Zenith can. That's why I stayed silent."

Her reply may be resolute, but her expression is pained.
Cliff gently held Elinalise by her shoulders.

"..."

In turmoil I couldn't find any words to say.
I did notice something odd about Elinalise.
But I never imagined a past like that.

"Sorry. I had thought about telling you. But recently Rudeus looked so happy, and that made me hesitate over it. Zenith's curse doesn't seem life threatening. I thought maybe she's a Miko, or maybe nothing at all..."

"... Please give me the details at a later time."

That's all I can say to all the excuses Elinalise tried to make.

"I understand."

I don't want to blame Elinalise.

Although she wasn't upfront, she did offer a few suggestions for Zenith's syndromes at the Begaritto Continent. Back then I thought she was just well informed and speaking from experience.

She's probably worried a lot over this.

Maybe she's right, that Zenith is different and her memory is recoverable.

Besides, with Paul's body still freshly buried, there's no reason to pile on the misery. She didn't say anything because she's worried about me.

At least, Zenith might be cursed. I hope she'll tell me what she can later.

Part 4

"Anything else?"

"That's all."

Perugius asks; I shake my head.

It has only been a few minutes, but I'm already exhausted.

Rather, it feels like I have been in conversation for hours instead.

There's more I want to ask.

About summoning magic, about the Laplace campaign, about the Metastasis event.

But right now, with so much on my mind, I feel like my head's going to explode at any moment.

That's it for now.

"Anyone else? Anyone have a request for me?"

"In that case, I have an inquiry. May I?"

A man stands up after Perugius asks.

It's Zanoba.

"You are?"

"Sorry. Third prince of Shirone Kingdom, Zanoba Shirone."

"A prince? Don't tell me you want my backing for the throne too?"

"No. I don't care the slightest about that."

With that said, Zanoba produces a small notebook.

Illustrated on it is a crest.

A crest I know of.

That's the crest we discovered with the doll blueprint in my basement...

Ah!

"This crest. It looks very similar to that of Dark Dragon King Maxwell-sama and Armor Dragon King Perugius-sama. More so, it looks the same as that crest on the wall there. Are you familiar with this?"

I follow Zanoba's vision to the crest hanging from the wall.

I do recognize some of the crests hanging there.

A crest I once saw carved in the power stone. The Dragon God's crest.
Another on the magic tools inside the hidden teleport ruins. Based on the incantation
I recited, that should be Holy Dragon Emperor Shilard's?
Then next to that, the same crest as the one on Zanoba.

"I am aware. The one you hold belongs to Mad Dragon King Chaos."
"Ohh!"

Ohh!
That's why. Is that what Zanoba saw carved in the arch?
No, that's Maxwell's.
He probably noticed the crest there, and saw the similarity.
Then realizing the connection between all of them.
As expected of Zanoba!
Oops, I'm sorry, I forgot to tell Zanoba about the crest on the teleportation ruin.

"T-then, where is Mad Dragon King Chaos-sama presently?"

Stepping forth, Zanoba couldn't contain his excitement.
However, Perugius can only shake his head.

"Dead. Died several dozen years ago. No clue if he has a successor."

The notebook slips from Zanoba's palm.
His arms hang powerlessly on their sides.

"So he's gone..."

Instantly, Zanoba looks 5 years older.
Well, he always did look rather old.

"Say, how did you find this crest?"

Seeing Zanoba like this, Perugius asks considerately.
Zanoba answers, still downcast.

"At my Shisho's house. Drawn on an autonomous doll in an abandoned house at Magic City Sharia."
"I see. An autonomous doll."

Zanoba nods; Perugia continues.

"That doll, is it something wonderful?"

"Of course it is! Such intricate craftsmanship, utterly mesmerizing, it fully conveys the maker's love for dolls. As a fellow doll enthusiast, I truly admire his philosophy!"

Hearing those words, Perugia squints his eyes, laughing happily.

"You look like someone who appreciates art. Good. In this castle's treasure room I also have plenty of Chaos's fine work. We shall check them out later."

Unbelievably gentle words coming from the same person that was talking to me earlier.

Why? What's up with the difference in treatment here.

Well, it can't be helped.

"It will be a great honor."

Hearing Perugia's answer, Zanoba smiles brilliantly.

The other side looks happy as well.

I guess Perugia really took a liking to Zanoba.

How nice.

I want to be liked too.

Part 5

"Anyone else?"

"Em, I... No, I do. I have one thing to ask."

Sylphy raises her hand after Perugius asked.

Slightly stiff as she bows at Perugius.

"And you are?"

"Escort for the Second Princess of Asura Kingdom Ariel-sama, wife of Rudeus Greyrat, Sylphiette Greyrat."

Just now, Sylvaril whispers something in Perugius' ear.

Perugius grunts unhappily.

"Husband and wife..."

Quiet whispers.

Husband and wife, why would he be unhappy with that?

Sylphy has strong magic as well, but definitely not comparable to Laplace.

Ah, don't tell me, he noticed that she has Magic Race ancestry?

"Before you ask, answer me this. Do you two have a son?"

Perugius asks abruptly.

Sylphy looks troubled.

"Eh? No, only a daughter..."

"Is that so. If you have a son, bring him to me. I shall grant him a name."

"O-oh.. okay."

Perugius smiles slightly.

Super scary.

What does he plan to do with Sylphy and my son?

Going as far as giving a brilliant name.

Coming from a guy that lives in a place called Chaos Breaker...

"Now, what do you wish to ask?"

"Well, about the Metastasis event. Who is really behind it?"

Sylphy asks a question I haven't spent much time thinking about.

The Metastasis Event was caused by summoning Nanahoshi from Japan.

The side effects of summoning someone from another world.

I was also accidentally transported as well. But hers was a direct teleportation, so that's probably what caused it.

It could be an accident too.

Someone did something, and as a result summoned Nanahoshi to this world.

An accident.

"This much is certain. Originally I suspected Laplace or someone associated with him, however..."

Perugius looks at Nanahoshi before continuing.

"Summoning her over is impossible even for me. In that case, it shouldn't be possible for anyone of this world."

"In other words?"

"I suspect it's not man-made. It just happened by chance."

Indeed an accident.

No, perhaps someone even better than Perugius in summoning magic exists.

Someone like Orsted.

But I don't know if such a person exists. If I mention it he might get angry.

I'll just keep my mouth shut.

I don't want to make him angry anymore.

"Ah, I see. Thank you very much."

While I'm hesitating, the conversation with Sylphy is over.

Perugius nods his head.

"Anything else?"

No one responds.

Elinalise lowers her head; Cliff too stiff to move.

Ariel stands on her side, and Luke kneeling still on the ground.

"Then take your time and enjoy my pride and joy, the Sky Castle."

With those words, the audience with Perugius ended.

Part 6

Afterwards Sylvaril led us to the guest rooms.

In the guest area there are almost 20 rooms with the exact same layout.

The same dark wood furniture, feather beds.

A large and clear full length mirror.

Some type of beer on the shelf.

The only difference between the rooms are the art hanging in them.

Almost like a hotel.

But, even more luxurious than those business hotels everywhere.

In my past life, this would probably be something akin to imperial suites.

No, forget a suite, I have never even been to an Imperial Hotel before.

"Such a large place with only 12 caretakers..."

Ariel saying that left quite an impression on me.

The entire place is spotless, but also so sterile.

Not so much creepy as lonely.

The kind of loneliness you feel when buying a second controller without a friend to play with.

But from the way Perugia talks, he should have guests once in a while.

It's free time after picking our rooms.

Zanoba and Ariel decide to go sightseeing and left in a hurry.

Of course, Sylphy and Luke went along too.

I decide to stay in.

"Phew..."

Exhausted.

It only took a hour, but it felt like we had been talking all day.

Not in the mood to go sightseeing, a break would be nice though.

With that in mind, I fell on the bed.

"Oh, how soft."

So soft, I feel like I would sink to the bottom of the feather bed.
Can I bring one home with me...

Putting the bed aside.
I should really think about what happened today.

First, that thing with Elinalise...
She should still be in.
Maybe I should go ask.
... Nah, she has her reasons. It wouldn't be good to pry.
She needs some time to prepare too.
One day I'll definitely go get all the details about these curses. That settles it.

That crest issue was certainly a surprise.
Dark Dragon King, Mad Dragon King, a bunch of names showed up.
I remember they're called the "5 Dragon Warriors."
Legend says the 5 of them once fought the Dragon God to a stalemate.
They can't really be the same 5 people as back then, right?
There must be quite a few generations already.

Armored Dragon King Perugius, Dark Dragon King Maxwell, Mad Dragon King Chaos.
Also from the incantation in the teleport ruin, Holy Dragon Emperor Shilard.
That's 4.
I remember there was a Dragon Emperor and 4 Dragon Kings.
So there's one more Dragon King.

Speaking of which, of the crests on the wall, I only saw 4 crests like the Dragon God's.
Does Perugius not have a good relationship with the last Dragon King?

Still, that doll turned out to be even more surprising.
I was wondering where I saw that crest before, turns out it's something related with those dragon people.
I still don't know what language it's written in...
Ah, right, if Perugius helps translate it, it would be a huge break for our research.
I should ask him to check it out.
But he doesn't seem to like me very much, or rather is quite vigilant towards me, maybe it's better for Zanoba to request it instead.
Zanoba and Perugius seem to click over their mutual interest in art.

Say, that Mad Dragon King crest was found in my basement.
In other words, the Mad Dragon King used to live there once.
That means, at home, that Mad Dragon King would lock himself in the basement and play with dolls.
Even though he's the Mad Dragon King.
Where does his madness lie?
Although playing with dolls is a little silly.
But, if he's someone like Zanoba, then in some ways they're both a little mad.
So Mad Dragon King Chaos also likes stuff like dolls.

Anyways, even though I came here to learn summoning magic, at this point it might be impossible.
Perugius seems really antagonistic towards me.
In that case, if I asked, he probably would say something like [Do you plan to use that magic to summon Laplace?]

... Is that even possible?
Perugius said summoning magic cannot bring forth anyone with great magic power.
My power apparently matches Laplace, so it might be possible?
Resurrecting the Demon God in a creepy underground altar.
No, I won't do something like that.
But if that's possible, then he's right in staying vigilant.

"In any case, it's good enough."

Although he hates me, he didn't kick me out, nor did he yell at me.
For now, some peace of mind.
Although not perfect, it's good enough.
Talk things out.
That's all I can do.

Thinking about various things, a day has passed at the castle in the sky.

CHAPTER 3

PAST, CURSE, SUMMONS, AND JEALOUSY

Part 1

There once was a young girl, rescued some 200 years ago from a Labyrinth. However, that girl lost all her memory and emotions. Her identity was unknown, but from appearance her race could be determined. Thus, that girl was dropped off at that race's village and began her life there. The villagers happily welcomed that girl.

That girl never regained her memories. But a few years later, emotions did return to her. Soon that bright and cheerful girl fell for a boy of the village, and they became lovers.

Soon they married, but from then a strange problem appeared. Her sexual appetite grew and grew. Every night she craved him.

The race that girl belonged to lacks a strong sexual appetite. Inferior to human or goblins. Because of that, the boy often felt troubled, but still they lived a quiet life.

Soon afterwards, that girl's body began to change.

Starting from her first time with a boy, every time of the month, she gave birth to something.

A magical crystal.

A small and round magical crystal.

Containing enormous magic power, it could be sold for a high price.

With her husband they discussed it.

Although it made him slightly uncomfortable, nevertheless he accepted her.

Afterwards, the boy sold the magical crystals in the city.

The enormous sums blinded him... But it wasn't his fault, so don't blame the boy.

They were not particularly wealthy, nor did the girl work.
At least, the boy did not treat that girl as a golden goose.
They lived happily together.

It happened 5 years later.

The boy died.

He was murdered.

Carrying valuables so regularly, he was marked by human bandits, and attacked, losing both life and money.

The boy died, and that girl became a widow.

Ten days after his death.

That girl lost control of herself and attacked another boy in the village.

She knew she shouldn't, yet she did.

But the target didn't really mind, so the matter rests.

Ten days passed.

That girl attacked another boy.

Another ten days, then another.

That girl went wild, her actions exposed, and was finally caught by the other girls of the village.

Thus she was cast out of the village.

Thereafter, she lived as a prostitute, a slave, and finally an adventurer, and even now she wanders the world.

Part 2

Listening to Elinalise's story was the first thing I did this morning.

"... That's pretty much my life's story."

"I didn't really need that much detail..."

Honestly, I feel rather bothered by that story.

All I really need is information about curses.

Yet, Elinalise went ahead and told me everything.

"I'm sorry for hiding this from you all this time."

"Does... Cliff know about this?"

"Of course, I told him everything before the wedding."

"Right... and Sylphy?"

"Sylphy doesn't know. Her grandma was once a prostitute, isn't it better if she doesn't?"

"I think Sylphy wouldn't mind something like this..."

"Rudeus too, please don't look at Sylphy differently after hearing these things. That girl may be of my blood, but she's just a normal girl."

"Of course I won't."

Elinalise is Elinalise, Sylphy is Sylphy.

Still, with a past like hers, I can understand why she wasn't so forthcoming as Sylphy's grandma.

Most people would probably look at her at a different light.

What's past is past.

One shouldn't run from one's past, but that only I know of it is enough.

"Well, in summary, what is this curse Elinalise speaks of?"

"Magic crystallizes within my body after being fertilized by men. Without sperm, the magic will expand until I die. That sort of feeling."

"But, nothing happened in the first few years?"

"I'm not very sure myself about that... But back then, my monthlies hadn't started yet, so that might be the case."

"Monthlies..."

So it's related to menstruation. Magic crystallized from her eggs?

In that case, Zenith's curse is probably something different.
Zenith already had two kids.
I should check with Lilia, but Zenith should be 35 or so, so it's possible.
Still, at least for now, nothing has happened.

"Your memory, did it ever return?"
"No, still nothing."
"... "

Her memory never came back.
So who Elinalise actually is, we may never know.
It's still possible that she would suddenly remember one day.
But after 200 years, I doubt it.

"Well, Zenith is different from 'that girl' back then. At least right now, she seems to recognize her flesh and blood. Maybe her memories can recover."
"It'd be great if that's the case."

I shouldn't be too optimistic.
Rather, I should just assume the worst and plan from there.

"What about the curse?"
"For now, no symptoms are like mine."
"Right."
"She probably... has a different curse."
"Right."
"It's highly likely. Do you have an idea?"

Idea?
Clues?
Well.
Maybe, maybe not.
I don't have any clue for the curse.

"Nothing."
"Is that so. Still, you can't be too careful."

It's probably not a life threatening one.
But as Elinalise said, there might be a trigger somewhere.

"In other words, all we can do now is wait and see?"

"Yeah."

Not too optimistic.

Hopefully, nothing will happen to Zenith in the future.

"That's everything I know. I'm sorry. There's a lot I didn't want to talk about, so I was very late in telling you these things."

Elinalise looks downcast after those words.

Yeah, it's a little late.

If it was someone else, he'd yell at her for not saying anything until now.

But I can understand wanting to hide a dark past.

Rather, I should be the one apologizing for hiding my past life.

"No, it's obviously something hard to talk about, yet you told me anyways. I'm really thankful."

I hold out a hand to Elinalise.

She held it tightly.

"Then, I'm heading back to Cliff's."

"I'll take a break, then head over to check in with Nanahoshi."

"Ah, then see you later."

Elinalise left the room with those words.

In the end, not much progress regarding Zenith.

Although a curse is highly likely, at least so far nothing happened.

Prepare for now, we'll deal with situations as they arise.

Part 3

After breakfast.

I sat by a long table in a room at the Sky Castle.

Seated besides me are Nanahoshi and Cliff, and next to him Zanoba.

Across me sits Sylvaril of the Void.

With jet black wings, an underling of Perugius.

"Well, let's begin."

Nanahoshi asked Perugius to tutor her in summoning magic.

Having said that, under Nanahoshi's care we ended up joining as well.

Since the lessons start from the basics, the teacher isn't Perugius.

Looks like we have to wait until the more advanced part before he makes an appearance.

Right now, Perugius is probably having tea with Ariel.

Although I don't know why exactly Ariel is so set on winning the throne, but having a goal is nice.

I'll support her from behind.

Since Sylphy is her friend.

Although their stations may differ, but there's no such concept as equality in the first place. It can't be helped.

Since Sylphy and Ariel consider each other friends, then they are.

Oh, I really should pay attention to the lessons right now.

"Then, first, just to make sure, what is summoning magic?"

Sylvaril of the Void starts the lesson with a question.

"Person over there..."

"Cliff. Cliff Grimoire."

"Then, Cliff, answer. What is summoning?"

Summoning Magic comes in two types.

The Enchantment type.

Primarily has to do with the creation of magic tools.

In other words, the art of drawing magic circles.

This is Cliff's major and is actively taught in Magic City Sharia.

The Summoning type.

A way to summon something from this world.

From the most basic creatures to smarter animals like cats and dogs.

Domesticated and docile magical beasts.

Low intelligence magic creatures like goblins and treants.

Or call up the various spirits that dwell in this world.

None of the teachers at Magic City Sharia know this magic, and only a few of the initiates at the Magic Guild are versed in it.

Maybe an unknown country has monopolized the techniques. Basically, no one teaches it at the Magic City.

That's all I know about it.

Cliff is probably the same and gave a similar answer.

"... That's incorrect."

To that, Sylvaril shakes her head in refutation.

"Indeed, magic circles are indispensable for summoning magic. But the art of magic circles itself can't be properly called summoning magic."

"In other words, summoning magic is the latter of the two types?"

I ask to confirm.

This reminds me of when Roxy taught me magic.

"Yes. It's true that summoning comes in two types."

"Basically, Enchantment isn't one of them."

"That's correct."

Sylvaril continues the lecture.

But there are no teaching supplies, no black boards.

We're using feather pens to take down notes.

This really feels like a lecture.

"Summoning come in two forms, "Magical Beast Summoning" and "Spirit Summoning."

Spirits exist in this world somewhere, but they seem to be rare.

I only ever saw the Spirit of Light from my magic scroll.

"What's the difference between them?"

"Magical Beast Summon is just as you think, it can summon creatures from various places. But by an ancient covenant man cannot be summoned. Besides that, it can summon any living thing of this world."

All living things.

Even dragons?

"Ancient Covenant?"

"A covenant passed down since the founding of summoning magic in this world. No magic can defy this covenant."

"I see."

Man cannot.

... But, is it really impossible?

Teleporting people, and summoning that person, what's the difference?

Em, oh well. Let's focus on the basics for now.

Once we get there, I'll ask properly.

"Sorry, please continue."

"Okay. With Magical Beast Summoning, it's impossible to summon any existence with greater magic power. Even if it's done, it cannot be controlled."

Ah, I read a story like this before.

The book was [Shigu's Summoning Techniques.]

A witch named Shigu summoned an existence she could not control, and was eaten alive.

I have enough magic to probably summon anything, but that doesn't mean I have to follow through.

Indeed, I have no plans to summon anything that scary.

Basically, I already have 3 pets at home.

No point in calling another one.

"Say, can we only summon living things?"

"Yes. We can't summon the dead."

"No, not that. Like things... For example, can I summon clothing from home?"

"That's impossible."

In other words, Roxy's panties are out of the question.

No, wait.

Nanahoshi successfully summoned a PET bottle.

So it isn't impossible.

It's more like this is the limit of the current technology of this world.

Then Perugia met Nanahoshi and confirmed her results.

So that's why Perugia and Nanahoshi ended up working together.

"May I continue?"

"Ah, yes. Sorry for the interruption."

"No, questions show you're paying attention."

Sylvaril nods slowly and continues the lecture.

"Spirit Summoning... is the magic of constructing spirits."

"Constructing? So they're made?"

"Yes. Using the magic of the summoner to construct spirits of various attributes. That is Spirit Summoning."

Oh.

In other words, those scrolls I been using.

When I summon them, I'm really making the Spirit of Light myself?

"Spirits have low intelligence. They'll follow the summoner's every command until their magic has been exhausted."

"Can they refuse any commands?"

"... If the magic circle has been especially designed that way, it might be possible."

Ohh.

Make it yourself, then it can be anything you want it to be.

So it's almost programming.

Eh?

Basically programming, where have I heard that before?

"That doesn't make sense."

Cliff sounds unsatisfied.

"You are Familiars of Perugia-sama, and he summoned you over 400 years ago, right? Yet you're both intelligent and permanent. Isn't that weird?"

Oh, as expected of Cliff to get to the heart of the matter.
Sylvaril nods with satisfaction.

"About that, allow me to explain. Perugia-sama's predecessor, the original Armored Dragon-sama, left behind the method of summoning 11 ancient spirits of both high intelligence and power. But such powerful spirits only lasted a day. It is Perugia-sama that developed a way to make it possible for them to exist as long as he lives."

Sounds like a point of pride for her.
Day long familiars becoming perpetual ones.
Perpetual motion, no matter what world that's an incredible achievement.
Eh?
11 ancient spirits?

"Don't you mean 12?"
"Right. I'm not one of Perugia-sama's spirits."
"You're not?"
"That's right. Perugia-sama rescued me during the Laplace Campaign. Since then I have always served him. I'm merely a Heaven Race."

Heaven Race.
Well, that makes sense, she's got wings after all.
Compared to the rest of his underlings, she seems more like his confidant.
Actually his lover... No, that's impossible.
Not every relationship is about love.

"Then, which will we be studying?"
"We'll use Magic Beast Summoning as the foundation, but Perugia-sama believes the other world's summoning is closer related to Spirit Summoning, so we'll touch up on that as well."

Teaching both types?
I'm looking forward to it.

Summoning magical beasts from all over the world and opening a zoo could be fun.

"Then if possible, please teach us Spirit Summoning in detail as well."

"I am also very interested in Spirit Summoning."

Zanoba and Cliff both seem particularly interested in Spirit Summoning.

Ah, that's right. I get it.

Programming.

The heart of the autonomous doll.

When I saw it back then, I thought it looked like programming.

In other words, with Spirit Summoning, it might be possible to complete the doll.

But I imagine, if the Mad Dragon King Chaos left it unfinished, it can't be that easy...

But, we should at least be able to take another step forward.

But I don't know the specifics of where to even begin to apply such knowledge.

"Well, let's start with the basics of Magic Beast Summoning. First take a look at this magic circle--"

While I was thinking, Sylvaril begins the lecture on basic summoning.

I really should have studied up the basics on my own rather than getting help.

Well, a little late for that.

Better now than never.

In the end, I'm only 18 years old in this world.

Compared to Zanoba.

Who's already 25 or 26 by the time he enrolled, yet still spends day and night practicing doll-making.

I need to follow his example.

Anyways, right now, I'm definitely behind everyone else.

After class, I need to do some self-study.

"By the way, everyone, it's about time for lunch. Please feel free to ask if you want something in particular."

With that said, Sylvaril ends the lecture.

Part 4

Lunch.

Last night various traditional cuisines from Asura Kingdom were prepared.

Meat balls and potato boiled in vanilla soup.

Wheat bread made with various whole grains.

Basically the same as in the Magic City.

It might look a little shabby for this castle, but it's simple and delicious.

It might seem like traditional cuisine to us, but to Perugius, it's what he considers a typical meal at Asura Kingdom.

Cuisine from 400 years ago.

It is said, technology advances in war, food advances in peace.

The food culture of the Asura Kingdom probably advanced quite a bit after 400 years.

Although food was served individually, I went to eat with Sylphy anyways.

No matter how luxurious the room is, eating alone is lonely.

I would never have thought about that in my past life.

I did eat breakfast alone, but it can't be helped.

"Something from Milis?"

"Ah, I want Shirone food."

Cliff and Zanoba both suggested food from home.

They probably feel a little homesick.

"I can do that. That's fine."

From behind her mask, Sylvaril's voice sounds gentle and accepts their requests.

"Anything is fine."

Nanahoshi responds.

Does she not realize what an opportunity this is?

I'm not a man that lets an opportunity like this slip away.

[Make the best use of the chance to its maximum.] The man known as Red Comet once said. [3]

"Vinegared white rice with sliced raw fish on top, are you familiar with that dish?" [4]
"Eh? For real?"

Hearing me, Nanahoshi suddenly brightens up.
But Sylvaril shakes her head.

"No, I don't, but I do prepare rice often."

Nanahoshi looks disappointed.
But now I'm excited.
As long as we have rice, then any side dish would do.

"How about adding chicken egg and flour in cold water, mixed well; add in shrimp, squid, and vegetables; then boil it all in hot oil?"[5]
"I've never heard of that before either, but we do have flour and eggs..."

We have eggs!
In other words, I can finally eat that! [6]

Well, no sushi and tempura.
Then probably no sukiyaki either.
We need cooking wine, rock sugar, and soy sauce for that.
It won't be the real thing, but with ingredients, I think we can come up with something close...
So it comes down to soy sauce.
The taste of Japan I long for comes down to soy sauce.

"Then, a sauce made from fermented soy beans. Does that exist? Soy sauce, anything like that?"
"Not in the castle."

Sigh, none.
Sure enough, this world, no soy sauce.

"But I have heard that sort of seasoning exists in Biheiriru Kingdom [7]. I can ask Arumanfi to check."
"Yes! Please!"

Even troubling Arumanfi is fine.
If it can be found, then he has to find it.

Part 5

A hour later.

In the end, no soy sauce.

Maybe an hour wasn't enough time for a comprehensive search.

It's only to be expected, looking for ingredients right before cooking starts.

No soy sauce.

But.

At least.

Arumanfi did bring something else.

Fermented from soy beans, a tea-colored edible.

They call it "tofu" in this world.

But I call it "miso."

Because that's what it is.

Biheiriru Kingdom... from memory, it's a country on the north-eastern corner of the Central Continent.

Maybe, there, I can finally find soy sauce.

I should visit one day.

Ten years, twenty years, if an opportunity arises I will definitely visit there.

I'll leave that aside for now.

We have rice.

We have miso.

We even have fresh fish.

No ginger or radish, but there is lemon.

I want to have pickles too, but I might be pushing my luck. So that'll have to pass.

With the ingredients we have, I try instructing Sylvaril the best I can.

"Is this how you want it?"

After a while, it finally arrives.

Freshly cooked rice.

Hot miso scallop soup.

Also, grilled fish with lemons.

Order for two.

The other is for Nanahoshi.

And I got a raw egg on the side.

"It's nice to eat something like this every once in a while."

"... Well, I guess."

The dishes look fantastic, but Nanahoshi doesn't look particularly pleased.

As expected, just looking like Japanese food won't impress her.

Ah, oh well.

Regardless it won't come close to the taste of Japan.

But it's kind of fun to try.

"Give it a shot. Itadakimasu."

"...Itadakimasu."

Nanahoshi furrows her brow and begins eating with a spoon and fork.

Doesn't look like she's enjoying it.

She peels off some fish with a fork, squeezes a little lemon juice on it, and puts it in her mouth.

Then follows it up with some rice with her spoon and starts chewing.

And takes a sip of the miso soup directly from its porcelain bowl.

And she finally said.

"This soup doesn't even have any dashi in it..."^[8]



Tears flow out of her eyes.
She didn't stop crying as she ate.

To be honest, the food doesn't taste particularly good.
The rice is dry, and the soup a tad salty.
The fish is delicious, but a bit fishy, and the lemon doesn't match.

The balance is off.
Not really tasty.
Japanese cuisine in our memory is much better than this.

But Nanahoshi's hands keep moving, and her tears keep dropping.
Eating quietly, and she soon finished.

"... Thank you for the meal."

With that, I am content.

Part 6

After the afternoon class, I return to my room.

Summoning Magic class is quite interesting.

Rather, Sylvaril is a good teacher.

Today she didn't teach anything special in particular, but I might fall behind pretty soon.

I need to study up while I still can.

You know, I wonder how long these lessons will take.

At this rate, maybe about a week?

Although at school only homeroom is required to attend, and the rest is free time, but I don't want to stay away from home for too long.

I'm worried about Lucy and how Zenith is doing.

Well, I should focus on what's in front of me.

All we can do for Zenith right now is observe her, and Aisha is taking care of Lucy.

What I should do now is review and prepare for Summoning lessons.

- Knock knock.*

Just when I sit down on a sofa and take out my notebook, someone knocks on the door.

"Rudi, are you in?"

Sylphy comes in without waiting for my answer.

After spotting me, she just wanders in and seats herself next to me.

Then, she sighs.

I take out a pitcher and pour a cup of water for her.

"Tired?"

"Thanks."

Taking the cup, Sylphy empties it all in one shot.

"Phew."

She looks exhausted.

"How was it? On Ariel-sama's side?"

"Ugh. Well, it's been rough."

"Really?"

"Perugius-sama doesn't really care for anything Ariel-sama has to say."

In an attempt to get Perugius in her camp, Ariel has been suggesting various incentives for helping her.

Like offering him a title once she becomes queen.

Or territory from Asura Kingdom.

Or offering various concessions in business.

Of course for Perugius, those things are long behind him.

"Well, of course."

"Really?"

"Isn't Perugius-sama living here precisely to get away from those things? Not just disinterested, he probably really hates them."

"Eh? I thought he said he lives here so he can always be ready for Laplace."

Sylphy looks puzzled.

Did Perugius say that?

Well, maybe that's one of the reasons.

"Besides, if he really wants power, then he could get it on his own. After all, he's still the hero of Laplace Campaign. Didn't Sylvaril say that he hates how old fashioned Asura is. Offering those things would only annoy him."

If he wants to, he can probably leave any time.

Yet he lives in seclusion.

Although I don't know the details, there are probably reasons for that.

"Really? I guess so. Ariel-sama is really anxious about this... Eh, Rudi, what do you think she should do?"

"What to do..."

I'm not good with these kind of things.

But I think Ariel got off the wrong foot.

Normally, don't you try to get to know each other first?
Requests can come after that.
If the other side felt troubled, then you can offer various concessions.
All things, one step at a time.

Ariel has charisma.
Maybe that's why she's always been able to convince others to support her cause, without making that first step.
So when she meets someone undaunted by her charisma, she gets cornered.
Nanahoshi, Perugia, both are like that.
And me too, I suppose.
I would help for Sylphy's sake, but for Ariel I don't really care.

"First, how about befriending Perugia-sama better?"
"Befriend?"
"Right, talk about his hobbies, listen to his war stories, those kind of things."
"Hobbies and war stories."
"Bringing Zanoba along might be a good idea. Among us, he seems to like that guy the most."

Zanoba and Perugia leading the conversation, and Ariel can join in on the side.
Perhaps that can get some results.

"Oh. Makes sense. I'll tell Ariel-sama to give that a shot."
"Don't take it too seriously? I could be totally wrong."
"Haha, thanks for the advice."

Sylphy finishes with a kiss on my cheeks.
Feeling her supple lips, my decision to study flew out the window, perverted thoughts fill my head.
Grab Sylphy right here, and let's make a second baby right on that bed...
Those thoughts cross my mind.
No, no.
I can't be so impulsive right now.
I need to study!
Okay, how about stroking that ass a little? No, better not.

"Say, how's things on your side?"
"Oh. It's like this."

With the H Genie sealed, I talk about the events of today.
Zenith and her curse.
Summoning magic.
Also, the meal with Nanahoshi.

"... Rudi is so nice to Nanahoshi."

Sylphy looks a little displeased when I mention Nanahoshi.
So eating alone with another woman is no good?
Well, Zanoba was there too.
Maybe I shouldn't have prepared something special for Nanahoshi.
Not good, got to do something to make Sylphy happy.
Sylphy needs a reminder that the one I love isn't Nanahoshi, it's her.

"Em, Sylphiette-san?"

"Yes?"

"May I have a hug?"

Hearing that, Sylphy puffs her cheeks and turns her head.

"Oh, playing nice all the sudden? What's wrong? Feeling guilty?"

Eh, eh?

Why is Sylphy so cold today?

What happened?

Is she mad?

Did I say something wrong?

Burnout?

We have been married for almost 3 years now.

The 3 year itch?

No, how many years doesn't matter.

What do I do now?

Danger, danger.

"Eh, sorry. You always seem so excited whenever Nanahoshi comes up, so spoil me for a bit."

Sylphy sticks out her tongue and hugs me tight.
I return the hug.
It feels so warm and soft.
Feels just like Sylphy.
Honestly, I might have done something that displeased Sylphy.
But, I don't want her to hate me.
I've got to be more careful in the future.

"If Rudi really wants to make Nanahoshi-san his third wife, please don't just drop it out of the blue like Roxy. Can we talk about it first?"

"No, that won't happen. My relationship with her isn't like Roxy and Sylphy. Just that, I know a bit about where she's from, so I want to give her a hand. There's nothing between us..."

"Oh really?"

Sylphy slaps me on the head with a smile.
Then she pat me on the back before she heads out.

"Well then, I need to get back to Ariel-sama. Do your best, Rudi."

"Ah, ok. You too, Sylphy."

Not good.
I was earnest, but without realizing it made Sylphy unhappy.
This is bad.
This is very bad.
I need to keep my distance with Nanahoshi.
I can't do too many things to please her.
Okay.

"Eh?"

Opening the door on the way out, Sylphy suddenly stops mid-track.
Nanahoshi is right outside.

"Sorry, I didn't want to bother you two, but... Cough.. Cough..."

Nanahoshi was coughing roughly.
Holding her chest and neck, she seems in serious pain.

"Sorry. I accidentally overheard your conversation. Cough... I don't plan to have that kind of relationship with Rudeus, so please rest assured... Cough.."

"Ah, oh. That's fine. More importantly, are you feeling alright?"

"It's fi-... cough, cough."

I never saw Nanahoshi in such a bad shape before.

Like something was stuck in her throat, she keeps coughing. How worrying.

"A bit, just now, I started to have a really bad cough... cough... cough... So I've been looking for someone to cast detoxification for me. I went over to Cliff's, but they're... busy. So I came over to find Rudeus... But if it will cause some misunderstanding, then I'll hold it and wait for Cliff tomorrow."

"No, it's fine. Don't worry about that..."

Sylphy hurriedly grabs Nanahoshi by her shoulders.

"Then, let me take care of it. If it doesn't work, then we can have Cliff cast an Advanced one instead?"

"Thank you very much, please do..."

"Alright, first thing's first."

Sylphy gently places a hand on Nanahoshi's neck.

She can use voiceless invocation detoxification magic too.

Something even beyond me.

No, I should have that potential too.

"Eh?"

While thinking that, Sylphy looks puzzled and confused.

The next moment, Nanahoshi's cough suddenly intensifies.

"Cough.. Cough..."

"Eh? It feels... really weird? Magic-ish... Eh?"

Sylphy tilts her head and places her other hand on Nanahoshi's shoulder.

Instantly, Nanahoshi's cough gets even worse. The situation is critical.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

Feeling anxious I ask.
Nanahoshi covers her mouth.

"Ugh.. cough!"

Splat.

"Eh?"

Blood splattered over the floor.

"Hey; hey!"
"..."

Nanahoshi looks stunned at her hand.
Then, she slowly opened her palm and showed it to us.
Her palm was painted red with blood.

Immediately, Nanahoshi lost consciousness and collapsed on the floor.

"Eh? Why?"

I'm not the only one in shock.
Sylphy stands stunned, unable to comprehend what has happened.

"Just now, I felt, in Nanahoshi... Why? Eh?"

Her face and hand splattered with blood, looking down at Nanahoshi on the ground.
Her face pale white.
I rush to her side.

"SYLPHY"

I yell out in a coarse voice.
Sylphy's entire body trembles. Fear in her eyes, she retreats several steps.

"N-No! It wasn't me! I didn't do it."

Sylphy has retreated into a corner.

I silently follow behind.

With her back against the wall, realizing she has nowhere to run, she can only shut tight her eyes.

"I might have said those words, but I was only joking around... Something like this... I would never do anything like this!"

I take out a handkerchief and dip it in some water (warmed with magic) and start wiping the blood off Sylphy's face.



"Eh?"

Then I wipe off the blood on her hand.

A patient's blood is a treasure trove of pathogens.

Although I don't think just wiping would help, but leaving the blood there probably won't do.

Sylphy offers no resistance.

"Don't worry. Sylphy. I was watching. It's not Sylphy's fault."

"Oh, oh."

I'm very calm right now.

Seeing Sylphy in a panic somehow calmed me back down.

Maybe it hasn't settled in.

For now, stay calm.

"It's fine. It's not Sylphy's fault. Nanahoshi has been weak lately. Right?"

"Em..."

"This time you just had bad timing. Caught her at her worst. It's not Sylphy's fault."

"... Em, em, but, just now, I felt, when I used magic, in Nanahoshi, something strange, detoxification, did not work at all... Not just that... it ballooned..."

Nanahoshi was on the ground, blood gushing from her nose and face.

Unconscious.

Situation critical.

Sylphy is still a mess.

Better to calm her down first.

No, better to keep her busy with something.

The best thing to stop someone from panicking is to give her a goal.

"Listen carefully, Sylphy. Cliff, Perugius-sama, go find someone and call him over."

"Call?"

"I will examine Nanahoshi's condition and do what I can. Meanwhile, Sylphy, go find help. Can you do it?"

"I-I can."

Sylphy's eyes regain focus.

Then, she heads to the door and rushes out.

Even though she has experienced a lot in her life, seeing so much blood close up must still be quite a shock.

Especially from someone she's familiar with.

Even if she's jealous, Sylphy would never do something like that.

But Sylphy could be impulsive sometimes...

No, no.

That's impossible. Definitely impossible.

"Okay."

Stopping myself from overthinking, I turn towards Nanahoshi.

Although there's little I can do here, I'll do what I can.

CHAPTER 4

LAMENTATION

Part 1

3 days after Nanahoshi collapsed.

Nanahoshi has yet to regain consciousness.
The reason that she vomited blood is unknown.

After Sylphy went to look for help, Arumanfi quickly came and brought Nanahoshi to the infirmary.

In the meantime, I went around to gather the party and inform them of the situation. Nanahoshi was not doing well. While casting detoxification magic on her, she vomited blood and collapsed.

Right now she's in the infirmary undergoing treatment.
The truth is, everything happened so suddenly that I don't know the details.
Although troubled, everyone accepts the situation.

Right now, Nanahoshi is being treated by Yuruzu of Atonement.
Yuruzu of Atonement has the ability to heal.
Capable of transferring the health and vitality from one person to another.
Because it works on a different principle than detoxification magic, it seems to work for illnesses untreatable with detoxification...
Still, her ability doesn't work by itself, and needs the cooperation of another person.
Without any hesitation Sylphy offers herself to help.

Sylphy lies down besides Nanahoshi and treatment begins.
But Nanahoshi has yet to regain consciousness, her expression grim, her cough constant.

"Karowante, how is she?"

Seeing Nanahoshi in this condition, Perugius orders another underling for diagnosis.

Karowante of Insight.
He has the power to uncover a target's power and secrets.
For the ill, also their condition.
Like X-ray vision.
He shakes his head after observing Nanahoshi.

"This is beyond Yuruzu's ability."
"Research the library."
"Yes."

With that said, Perugius and his subordinates begin researching the name and cure of Nanahoshi's sickness.
Trying to match Nanahoshi's symptoms to the library's records.
I offered to lend a hand but was refused. Outsiders cannot enter the library.
Of course, Yuruzu continues to administer treatment, so Sylphy never left the infirmary.

In the end, there's nothing for me to do.

Of course, I didn't just sit around and do nothing for 3 days.
I returned home once to inform Roxy of the situation.
Nanahoshi fell ill and Sylphy is helping with the treatment.
So it may be some time before we return.

Roxy begins to move at once with that information.
She helps us contact school and request a leave of absence, as well as explaining the situation with family.
Then to me she said to leave the house to her.
She's far more cool-headed than I am.
She has gotten accustomed to these type of situations.
In the end, I couldn't do anything. Everything has been taken care of.
I informed Aisha and Norn that I'll be coming back late, took a change of clothing and returned to the Sky Castle.

Even at home, there's nothing for me to do.
All I can do is pray that Nanahoshi stays safe.

"... Nanahoshi, will she recover?"

The others, like me, can do nothing.
Particularly Cliff.
He spend his time praying at a chapel within the castle.

"Everything is in the hand of Milis-sama."

Cliff said, with his hands folded and eyes closed.
Praying to God during moments of crisis.
I never really believed in that religious stuff.
In this world, I believe in those that actually offered a helping hand.
But even I understand that, right now, praying to Roxy and Sylphy can bring no comfort.

"..."

Suddenly, I recall a movie I once watched.
A masterpiece of alien invasion.
Aliens, with their overwhelming technology, nearly annihilated mankind.
Yet at the end all their machineries suddenly stop working.
Aliens have no immunity against earth pathogens and all perished.

[9]

Nanahoshi came from another world.
She differs from me, who's reincarnated.
She does not grow old, does not have magic, and therefore can't use any magical tools.^[10]
Perhaps, not just magic, she has no immunity either.

But, if that were the case, then she should have fallen ill long ago.
The Metastasis Event happened 8 years ago.
Nanahoshi also came to this world 8 years ago.
There's no reason for this to happen now.

"..."

That girl.
Will she really die..?

Why did this happen?

Part 2

4 days after Nanahoshi collapsed.

We are summoned to a round table.

Besides Yuruzu, all other Familiars are present.

Perugius sits before them.

He sat on a luxuriously big chair with the Familiars standing behind.

"Please sit."

We sit down on Sylvaril's suggestion.

Absent is Sylphy, who is helping Yuruzu with treatment, 7 present in all.

"Nanahoshi-sama has been diagnosed."

Once we're seated, Sylvaril steps forward and reports.

We finally know.

"Nanahoshi-sama suffers from Drain Syndrome." ^[11]

Drain Syndrome.

Never heard of it.

Looking around, neither did anyone else.

Even someone as informed as Cliff comes up empty.

"It's expected that no one has heard it before. A disease from time immemorial, when men held far lesser magic power than now. If a child is born without any magic capacity, without exception, that child experiences similar symptoms and by the age of 10, dies."

So the same situation as Nanahoshi.

Although she's not 10, she has been in this world for over 8 years now.

And she doesn't have an ounce of magic...

At least, it's not Sylphy's fault.

Thank goodness.

"According to records, those without magic power absorbed minute amounts of magic from outside, after 10 years of accumulating in their body, it becomes an illness..."

Without magic, their ability to absorb magic from outside is minute.
I don't know the details, but I guess magic is like bacteria in a way.
For those with magic power, the good bacteria kill the bad, but in those without any power only bad bacteria accumulates.
We don't know for sure how trustworthy the records are.
But that does make a lot of sense.

"Does it record a cure?"

"No. According to the records, this disease was eradicated some 7000 years ago, after humanity increased in magic power."

7000 years ago, so the first Human-Demon Great War.
I remember hearing that the war raged for nearly a thousand years.
The war caused all kinds of advancements.
Through various means, humanity self improved.
One side effect is the eradication of this disease.
That's possible too.

Say, 7000 years ago.

There can't be many texts that managed to survive such ravage of time.
Finding the disease's name is already a miracle in and of itself.

"Then, what do we do?"

"We stop time."

The one that answers my question isn't Sylvaril.
But rather the calmly seated Perugius.

"Borrow the power from Sukeakoto of Time ^[12] and stop time for Nanahoshi."

Perugius declares and a man steps forward.
He wears a mask with its mouth sticking out.
A Hyottoko mask, rather, more like a gas mask.
He is Sukeakoto of Time.

From what I remember, he has the ability of stopping time for anyone he touches.
Of course, time freezes for himself as well. But with this ability, he can prevent Nanahoshi's illness from worsening or death.

But who knows how long he can maintain it, nor does it solve the root of the problem.

"I see, then what?"

"Contact people on the ground and find a cure."

Oh.

That could work.

No one will refuse someone like Perugius.

"Still, the question is who would help Nanahoshi."

"Isn't there some way with Armored Dragon-sama's influence?"

"Nanahoshi and I only have a cooperative relationship. I shall not owe favors for her sake."

Isn't that a bit cold?

Still, I don't know the exact details of their relationship, so I have no right to object.

"Don't be mistaken. As guests of my castle, I'll offer some minimum assistance. But don't expect everything. My ultimate purpose is to find and destroy Laplace."

In other words, because of the work related to observing Laplace, he will not do more than necessary to help.

Nor will he owe favors to others.

Favors demand repayment.

Particularly so for the cure of an long eradicated disease.

The other side will definitely expect something big in return.

Perugius has no reason to go that far for Nanahoshi.

No, actually he has plenty of reason not to.

Keeping Nanahoshi alive is as far as he'll go.

He refuses to do more. If someone wants to help, then he's free to help.

That is the meaning behind Perugius's words.

That should be right.

"... So you will just watch Nanahoshi die!?"

The one that yelled is Cliff.

He stood up screaming towards Perugius.

"When did I say that?"

"Lies. Someone like you, inside such a impressive castle, with so many capable Familiars! You can definitely find a cure!"

Hearing Cliff, Perugia raises an eyebrow.

"I have no reason to help."

"Quit joking around! Helping the weak is the duty of the strong!"

"Pssh, don't push those detestable Milis teachings onto us."

"What did you say!"

Cliff got overexcited and blurts out without thinking.

He's a follower of Milis.

The Milis Church shares many similarities with Christianity.

It's possible it also has lessons on giving a hand to lost sheep and the like.

But saying that to Perugia is improper.

Perugia has his own concerns.

For 400 years, he only moved with one goal in mind.

Perugia indeed wishes to gain knowledge of other world summoning through Nanahoshi.

But that is second to Laplace.

Just a way to lull away time.

"In other words, you'll just watch Nanahoshi die! If you're going to help, help until the end."

"Cliff, stop!"

Cliff stands up kicking back his chair. Elinalise screams at him.

She put a heavy hand on Cliff's shoulder, stopping him from going further.

"Cliff, I understand how you're feeling, but control yourself."

"..."

"I don't want to lose you for this."

Looking around, all 11 Familiars in battle stance.

Seeing Cliff getting held back, Perugia smiles in ridicule.

"If you have a problem, then why don't you do it yourself? Your god said so too. When helping others, don't count on someone else, isn't it?"

"Grr..."

Looking unsatisfied, Cliff fell back to his chair.

He doesn't want to fight with Perugius.

He just thought, for a person like Perugius, capable of almost everything, he ought to be able to help.

"Mmhm..."

What do we do?

I want to help Nanahoshi.

But I don't even know where to begin?

Looking at Ariel and the others, they seem to be thinking the same thing.

Aisha and Nanahoshi know each other too, if Nanahoshi dies she'd be upset too.

Also if she dies, Sylphy would feel responsible.

Is there anything I can do?

Am I that powerless?

"Excuse me."

Just now, the door to the round table opens.

It's Yuruzu of Atonement.

She speaks facing us.

"Nanahoshi-sama has regained consciousness."

I almost leaped out hearing this.

"H-how is she?"

"On the surface she has improved a little."

"On the surface?"

"Indeed. Doline Syndrome is the result of magic accumulating in the body, which makes one ill. That illness has not been cured."

The way she says it, it feels like HIV.
So all the coughing is also a symptom of her illness.
In other words, although the surface symptoms have been cured, the cause remains.

"Then, can you remove magic from within her?"

"I cannot."

"Then, who could?"

Yuruzu shakes her head at my question.

"Is that so..."

Is there no way to remove the magic inside her?
Like, a magic tool of some sort?

7000 years passed, technology should have advanced quite a bit in this area.
But what should be done?

Would the magic absorbing stone work?

No, that does nothing for magic within the body.

I have a feeling that it can't be done.

Maybe a magic tool can be made with that property?

But how long will that take?

We don't have any leads in the first place.

Damn.

"In any case, we should go check up on Nanahoshi."

With that said I stood up, everyone else follows as well.

Part 3

The infirmary feels rather dreary.

The furniture doesn't differ too much from the guest rooms.

But the stone structures are exposed and the walls lack windows.

In the center of the room there's some sort of operating table, with knives and bandages in the drawers.

"..."

Nanahoshi is at a corner.

The bloodstains on her are gone. She has been changed into a patient gown-like outfit. Sterile, lifeless.

"Nanahoshi, are you alright?"

I ask. Nanahoshi glares at me and said.

"Do I look alright?"

"..."

Of course not.

Her face pale, dark circles under her eye.

Anyone can see she's not doing well.

Atonement's ability is hard even for the patient.

The other bed is empty.

Like on a rotation with us, Sylphy left for the guestroom.

I saw her on the way in. She looks rather haggard.

For 4 days, she assisted in the treatment.

Even though I doubt she was without food or water, it must still be hard on her body.

"They say I can't be cured."

"Ah, oh."

I sit on a chair beside her.

Doesn't look like Miss Yuruzu kept her in the dark about her illness.

"No, you will be better soon."

"I won't get better."

Having said that, Nanahoshi turns away.

Looking at the wall in silence.

What I said was probably irresponsible.

I don't know what I should be saying right now.

"..."

After I fell silent, Ariel and others all try to make conversations.

Some try to comfort Nanahoshi, others try to raise her spirit, and others say you'll definitely get better.

They each try to encourage her in various ways.

But right now, they might all have the opposite effect.

The one really suffering doesn't want to hear niceties like these.

"..."

Soon after, everyone ran out of things to say.

With Nanahoshi unresponsive, nobody knows what to talk about.

The silence is suffocating, making everyone restless.

"Then, Nanahoshi. I'm heading back. I'll come back to check up on you."

Starting with Ariel, everyone leaves for their rooms one by one.

Even though Cliff wishes to stay, but with Elinalise urging he left as well.

When they leave, I could hear Elinalise saying [... Nothing we say matters right now.]

And that's how it is.

Then, only I remain.

Why did I stay. I'm not sure either.

Still, I felt I have to stay for a little longer.

It's dangerous to leave her alone.

"..."

But I have nothing to say.

With a sick person.
With a person suffering from an incurable disease.
No matter what I say, they're just niceties.

Nanahoshi is very upset.
Her summoning research has been going so well.
Phase 1 had a little hiccup, but Phase 2 and 3 both proceeded smoothly.
Phase 4, with a little help from Perugia, should have results soon.
I'm not sure with Phase 5, but it's only a matter of time.
Maybe in 1, 2 more years she can return home.
To hear that she has an incurable disease, at a moment like this, of course she's upset.
Maybe not cancer, but it's still said to be terminal.

I wouldn't be surprised if she got violent.

No, if it really is incurable.
If her future is so bleak, then a little violence is fine.
I'd cooperate.
No matter what, as long as it helps her mood a little.

"I wasn't particularly healthy in the first place."

While I stay silent, Nanahoshi speaks with a sigh.
She sound more composed than I expected.
But Nanahoshi is obviously faking it.

"Getting sick... Although never this bad, I'd catch the cold every year."

Slowly words trickle out.
And I quietly listen.

"My grades aren't bad, but I'm no good with sports. If asked, I guess I'm the indoor type.
Medicine in this world isn't very advanced, right?
Do you know? Maybe it has to do with magic, but people of this world don't even dress their wounds? And because of that they die or lose a limb. It's retarded. All can be prevented with a bit of clean water over the wound.
Because I can't use magic, so I do all kinds of things to stay safe. Avoiding contagious diseases, staying away from crowds, don't eat strange foods...

It's true, from your perspective I might have lived unhealthily, but I exercise at home too! I took care of myself.

Because if I get sick, there might not be a cure.

Rather, if I'm sick, I probably won't be cured.

Because, if I get sick, I probably won't know why...

... Basically, this world, isn't it too weird?

Gigantic monsters too big to support themselves. I don't know what wizardry that is, but aren't they clearly against rules of nature?

Of course, even I, when I came, was a little curious.

Even I played games before. I don't hate sword and magics stuff. I'd be lying if I wasn't excited.

Just a bit, I'm jealous that you were born in this world, and you can live in this world..."

Nanahoshi said, and suddenly shuts up.

Her shoulders tremble.

Slowly, she turns to me.

Face wrinkles.

Tears collected on her swollen eyes.

"I don't want to die."

Like a dam busting, tears come pouring down.

"I don't want to die here! I don't want to die in this weird world! Why? Why? It's too weird! Hey, do you know? I didn't change at all for 8 years! I don't grow taller, and my hair doesn't grow longer! I get hungry, I poop, but my nails never grow. I don't even get periods!"

Nanahoshi throws a nearby water jug.

The jug slams the wall, splatters in loud pieces. Water soaks the bed.

"I'm not a human of this world! In this world I don't even count as alive! I'm basically a corpse! Even so, why? Why do I get sick? Isn't that just too weird? Why am I unlucky like this? I don't want to die! I don't want to die in this strange world!"

Nanahoshi screams, tears keep splattering, and splattering.

"Because I never even had my first kiss! Even though I have someone I like, I never even told him that I love him! I'm really so jealous of you! Everyday so happy, so

fulfilling! What? Dad died? Mom got sick? So what? What's so bad about that? At this rate, I won't even see my dad again! If I die, mom won't even know! Just one more time! Dad! Mom! I still remember! I still remember that morning. Dad says he'll come home early. Mom says we'll have fried Saury tonight. I told dad that I'm hanging out with friends, but staying a little out is fine, and complained to mom that I'm tired of Saury already. Why, why did this happen? Dad and mom are probably worried sick about me. I want to go home. I want to see them again. I don't want to die. I don't want to die in this place... Woo.. Hick..."

"..."

I feel a sharp pain in my chest.
I can understand Nanahoshi's pain.

When I first came to this world, I couldn't sympathize.
Can't go back, can't meet again.
Not able to see family once more.
Even if you tell me, I won't understand.
Back then, I probably want to forget those things and just enjoy life in this new world.

But now it's different.
I understand wanting to go back, wanting to meet again.
Everyday is life's greatest treasure.
Once they're gone, they're gone forever.
... Because if they're gone, they're gone forever.

Paul is dead.
Zenith's memories may never come back.
Buina village and that warm home have both disappeared.
From now on, all I can do is protect my own family, my own life.
Sylphy, Roxy, Lucy.
Lilia, Aisha, Norn, Zenith.
If I separate from them, it would be gut wrenching.
If someone disappears, then I'd go to heaven and hell to find her.

If I return to the original world.
If magic like this exists in that world, I'd seek it.
I would do everything I can to return.

"Woo... Wooo...."

Holding her knees Nanahoshi cries.

Cliff, Zanoba, Sylphy, she was never close to any of them.

Only with me did she ever pay any attention.

Listen to my requests, accepting my invitations.

If I think about it, she had never done anything to wrong me.

Nanahoshi looked so excited when we chat in Japanese.

To her, maybe Japanese with me is her only anchor from that world.

"Someone, save me..."

Hearing her meek whisper.

I stand.

Part 4

I return to the round table where Perugius remains.
All his Familiars have already left.
Only Perugius is left, like he has been waiting for me.

"What shall it be?"

"... I am taking action. I hope, as long as it doesn't interfere with your own work, that Perugius-sama will offer some assistance."

Perugius nods heavily when I finish.

"Oh, so you're finally making a move. Good. If Nanahoshi dies, even I would feel sorry."
"Thank you very much."

But what should I do?

The cure to a disease eradicated some 7000 years ago.

Where do I even begin?

We already know both detoxification and healing magic are ineffective.
If those have worked, then Perugius would already done something.

Magic tools.

I don't know if one might work.

One that works inside the body should be related to Cliff's magic tools.

But Cliff's magic tool was custom made for Elinalise only.

Observe Elinalise's condition and adjust step by step.

Although there are results, but it's still incomplete.

Maybe it only needs a few adjustments to control Nanahoshi's symptoms?

But right now, Nanahoshi doesn't have the time for observation and adjustment.

She has coughed up blood.

Even if we cure the surface symptoms, it will just happen again.

Next time, it might be fatal.

Moreover, if we froze time, then there's no way to experiment.

Magic tools are no go.

Maybe one might eventually work, but right now we need a more immediate fix.

A cure.

Does no one know?
Not even Hitogami or Orsted?
Would they know?

I can't contact Hitogami.
Maybe he'll show up with advice tonight.
But I have no way to initiate contact.

"Perugius-sama. Do you have a way to contact Dragon God Orsted?"
"Impossible. His movements are impossible to understand."

No way of contacting Orsted.

"He probably doesn't know either. He has been in this world for maybe a hundred years. Although he's wise, I doubt he will know about a disease from 7000 years ago."

So Orsted is a hundred or so.
Although old, compared to Perugius he's still a youngling.
No, compared to me he's old enough.

"Is that so. But someone who knows about the world 7000 years ago..."

Wait, hold on.
7000 years.

There's one.
There's one person that lived for so long.
Even though she might not be familiar with this illness...
But if I talk to her, maybe I can find a clue.

"I know someone..."
"Oh?"

But, I don't know if I can find her.
Last time it was a chance meeting.
And just like that we separated.
No particular connection.

But I have to do something.

If I do nothing, then nothing will change.

"Perugius-sama, can you take me to the Magic Continent?"

"Magic Continent? What do you plan to do there?"

I only met that person once.

Although Roxy also met her before, but where she is now I do not know.

But her name I knew from long ago.

Back in the Fedoa Capital, a name I learned from history lessons.

After we met, there's no way I could forget it.

"Meet with The Great Empress of Demon Realm, Kishirika Kishirisu."

7000 years ago.

A figure of the first Human-Demon Great War.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS DEMON CONTINENT ONCE AGAIN

Part 1

The plan is simple.

First, with Perugius's assistance, head to the Magic Continent.

Find Kishirika Kishirisu.

Ask if she knows a cure, or knows someone who does.

Indeed it's quite simple.

If only the Great Demon Empress Kishirika Kishirisu would stay put on a throne overseeing a city somewhere.

But I know Kishirika wanders the Magic Continent.

Meeting her is all up to chance.

Who knows how many months it'll take.

Perugius said that he has magic teleportation circles near all major cities in the Magic Continent.

Thinking about it, magic teleportation circles are truly terrifying.

Especially when he can teleport anywhere in the world from this castle, an incredible threat.

After all, there's no way to attack this castle in the sky, yet there's no defense against it.

So it's understandable why the art has long been forbidden.

Even though Orsted and Perugius have both been using them in secret.

This world probably has quite a few guys secretly breaking the rules.

It might be cheating, but that's the nature of this world.

Those magic teleport circles probably aren't used by Orsted alone.

Anyways, find Kishirika.

Just like Roxy had done before, search one city at a time.
Who knows how long it'll take.
But it shouldn't take more than a year.
Since teleporting only takes a day.

The problem is what if Kishirika and us pass each other somewhere.
About that, I think I'll ask the Adventurer's Guild for assistance.
Reward for the capture of the Great Empress of the Demon Realm.
Capture Kishirika.
Must be alive.
ALIVE ONLY. ^[13]

I gather everyone together and lay out my plan.
Ariel, Luke, Cliff, Zanoba, Elinalise.
And also Sylphy.
Sylphy regained consciousness while I was talking with Perugius.
But her exhaustion is obvious.
She was thin to begin with, but now she's more frail than ever.
She should rest for at least 5 more days.

"Everyone, please lend a hand for Nanahoshi's sake."

When I said that, Ariel nods in approval.

"Then, I can provide some magic tools."

Ariel removes the magic rings she's wearing and hands it to me.
A pair of matching rings, when injected with magic, both gemstones will shine together.
Useful for an emergency, seems like a secret magic tool of the Asura Kingdom.
Although I don't know what for, I'm sure it'll come in handy.
Reminds me of a pager.

"Zanoba and Elinalise, please accompany me."

I ask Zanoba and Elinalise to be my guards.
No matter what, Zanoba is a miko.
Even if we were to fight a hydra, he can probably come in handy.

Because I lack touki, I'm weak defensively, but with [Disturb Magic] and absorbing magical stones my resistance against magic is strong.
With Zanoba as forward guard, we can even take that hydra.
But, I can't bare to see Zanoba die for my selfish desires, so with Elinalise as support I feel reassured.

"I..."

"Cliff-senpai, I'd like you to make a magic tool."

Honestly, I don't know whether we can find a cure.
Kishirika might not know either.
So this trip might be a waste of time.
To avoid this, we should try different approaches.

Nanahoshi's illness seems similar to a curse.
With some adjustments to his research, maybe Cliff can develop a magic tool to extend Nanahoshi's lifespan.

"I want to go too!"

Even though I thought so, Cliff refused.

"Please take me, I want to help Nanahoshi as well."

But continuing his research will help Nanahoshi too.
But Cliff probably wants to do more than that.
Like if he just continues as usual, he won't feel like he's really done anything for Nanahoshi.

"Please, Rudeus, even I could understand her want for returning home."

Cliff begging like this.
Now that I think about it, he has been away from home for a long time too.
Height-wise he might look only 15, but he's already 19.
I heard he left the Holy Kingdom of Milis almost 6-7 years ago.

Although the home Nanahoshi looks to return to isn't the same as Cliff's.
But their intent is the same.

"Fine."

"Really?"

Well, with Elinalise coming along and Nanahoshi frozen in time, he won't have many opportunities for research.

Yeah, no reason to force it.

If we confirm that there's no cure, or if we can't find Kishirika, then we can focus on research instead.

"Yes. I'll be in your care, Cliff-senpai."

Let's shorten the search period a bit, so we can get back to research in time.
Half a year is enough.

"... Then, is there... anything I... can do?"

Finally, Sylphy asks, looking unwell.

She has yet to recover.

She can't travel with us.

Besides...

"Sylphy, please rest here for now."

"Em, and then?"

"After rest..."

I'm hesitant over what I'm about to say.

"I wish for Sylphy to return home to care for Lucy."

"Eh?"

Sylphy looks visibly gloomy, but I continue anyways.

"It might be a long time before I can return home this time. I don't think it's good for both parents to disappear on her."

For children, parents' presence is absolutely necessary... I don't have to say that.

But it's because Paul and Zenith exists, that I'm who I am.

For children, it's better for the parents to rear them personally.

Of course, absence for a week or two won't be a big deal.

But not a few months.

"Ah, that. You're right. If Rudi isn't here, then I need to take care of Lucy."

"Sorry."

"Um."

Even though Sylphy has been informed that Nanahoshi's collapse isn't her fault, she still want to help somehow.

"Sylphy has done enough. Leave the rest to me."

"Em..."

Sylphy nods with regrets.

Of course she loves Lucy.

But at 10, she was forced to stand on her own after the Metastasis Event. Without a last goodbye, both her parents passed.

She did well despite that.

Despite some twists and turns, she found a job, got married, and managed to live on. So for her, maybe parents may not be that great of a presence.

Or perhaps, even children without parents can grow and prosper is the wisdom of this land.

Sylphy is only 18.

People won't change that much, just because of childbirth.

It was only through caring for my own, did my thinking start to change.

When I was 18 in the previous world, children didn't even cross my mind. In comparison, Sylphy is exceptional.

I will help Nanahoshi. Sylphy will stay at home.

I hope she won't feel jealous.

"But won't Roxy complain? Roxy knows the Magic Continent the best."

"That too. Well, if we're in trouble, I'll talk to Roxy about it."

Roxy isn't present.

No matter the reason, Perugia will not allow a Magic Race to enter the castle.
She tried to come but was refused.

Besides, Roxy has her teaching career.
She's finally getting used to the rhythm of work.
She can't quit with only a year on the job.

I will help Nanahoshi.
But, I also need to maintain my current lifestyle.
Lifestyle is important.
Both are important.
That's why, I need to protect Sylphy and Roxy.

Of course, that's also because I'm selfish.
I don't think I'm always right.
But right now I don't want Roxy and Sylphy to face danger.
I don't want them to die in front of me like Paul.
Even though perfect security doesn't exist in this world.
Compared to the Magic Continent, Magic City Sharia should be much less dangerous.

"Please don't do anything like lose your hand again."

Sylphy looks uneasy.

"I'll be careful."

Staying safe is why I'm bringing Zanoba and Elinalise along.
But if they're in a life or death situation, even sacrificing my right hand I'll help them.
Of course, I don't want to die either...

I won't make a mistake again.

Part 2

I went home again and explained the situation to Roxy and rest of the family. Aisha cried when I said I might not be home for a long time.

But this time coming and going would be easy.

I plan to come back every once a while.

Like going on a business trip.

I'm saying that going for a long time is just in case.

The magic teleportation circles might suddenly stop working, and I might not return.

"Well, please take care."

"I understand, Rudi take care as well."

Although I was worried that Roxy wanted to come too, but after listening to my explanations, she bluntly accepts staying home.

That slightly disappoints me.

Well, looks like I'll travel many times to Sky Castle now, so preparations are important.

Accidents might happen.

Perugius said, even if the magic teleport circles stop working, he'll come get me if I use the magic tool near any monuments to the Seven Great Major Powers.

Not that I don't believe him, but you never know.

For example, if we leave and all of a sudden Laplace revived, then he might be too busy to help.

Additionally, I brought some Spirit of Light scrolls and other convenient items.

All set.

Part 3

The magic teleportation circle lies below ground of the Sky Castle.

The castle in the sky isn't just expansive above ground, but below as well.

Not just that, but underground is even more sophisticated.

Just a few levels down it becomes almost maze like.

The castle grounds are probably made for guests. It's below ground that's the real deal.

"We're here."

Sylvaril led us to a particular room 3 levels below ground.

A place easy to find once you know the directions.

No lighting in the room, but the magic circle shines pale white, illuminating the room.

"Perugius-sama just completed this magic circle to reconnect with an abandoned one on the Magic Continent."

"Abandoned?"

"It happens often with teleport magic. Destroy the magic circle on one side, and the other side stops working as well."

Teleport circles come in pairs.

But you can repair a broken one and use it again.

Magic circles of this world really come in all kinds.

"These kinds of magic circles are all under Perugius-sama's control?"

"Perugius-sama is indeed a great man."

Sylvaril sounds proud.

Speaking of which, drawing magic teleportation circles.

In these situation, making ones at will to connect everywhere sounds quite convenient...

But, because it's forbidden, he probably won't want to teach me.

Well, if I push my luck, I might end up making all sorts of enemies, so I shouldn't be greedy.

Nor should I forget that others can use them too.

For example, if a violent magic beast accidentally stumbles into one. It's possible. If my magic teleport circles end up destroying a village or something, I'd have nightmares.

"Perugius-sama said this magic circle should get you close to the Great Demon Empress."

"Does Perugius-sama have any lead to Kishirika's whereabouts?"

"Of course."

Really?

He has a lead.

I thought I'd be on my own once I get there.

"But he could be wrong as well."

"... True."

The Demon Empress I know is unpredictable.

We might think she's somewhere, and by the time we get there, she has already disappeared somewhere else.

Her fiance Badigadi is the same...

Ah, right, Badigadi too.

I haven't seen him in a while. Maybe he returned to his domain already.

He has lived a long time as well, contacting him might give some result as well.

"I understand. We shall go investigate."

"We haven't confirmed the situation on the other side yet. The exit might be sealed as well. Be careful."

"Sealed?"

"The entrance might be destroyed to keep it hidden."

If there's no entrance, then it can't be found.

I see. That makes sense.

Sure people will look for trapdoors, but few will take a pickaxe and start wailing on walls.

Ancient Egyptians invented this technique.

Archaeologists have to pay special attention to seemingly empty graves.

Maybe that's how teleportation ruins were discovered as well.

"Em, if it doesn't work, then we'll return early."

"May the fortune of war be with you."

With Sylvaril's blessing we entered the magic teleportation circle.

Part 4

How many times have I teleported by now?

Metastasis Event, to and from Begaritt Continent, and also Perugius's magic tool.

All in all, this is the fifth time.

Like waking up from a dream, I'm getting used to this sensation.

"Phew."

After the teleport, we arrived at a dark room.

The air is thick and moldy.

It has been abandoned for a long time.

No lights.

Not even a candlestick.

Basically a ruin.

Ah, I forgot to ask where we're going.

"Achoo!"

Cliff sneezes behind me.

I turn around to look. The other three have already stepped off the magic circle.

Elinalise is used to this. Zanoba pompously walking around.

Zanoba curiously studying the magic circle.

"Too dusty here, let's head out as soon as possible."

As Zanoba said that, I start looking for an exit.

"Eh?"

I see a wall.

Nothing like a door.

No ladder, not even a hole in the ceiling.

I carefully inspect the floor. Yep, no way out.

It's a secret room.

If Sylvaril's right, the room has been sealed.

"Em, well, where's the exit?"

"Um."

We split up to look.

Up, down, left, right, B, A.

"Found it."

After a while, Elinalise discovered space behind a wall.

Looks like she discerned it by knocking.

Maybe it's too thick, but I couldn't tell even when pressing an ear against it.

As expected of the Long Ear race.

"Okay. All yours, Zanoba."

"Um."

With a single punch, Zanoba punched a hole in the wall.

A huge hole on the wall some 50 CM thick.

As easy as tearing down a sand castle, he expanded the hole until it has room enough for one.

With Zanoba bracing, Elinalise passes through.

"I'll check ahead."

Complete darkness on the other side.

You can't even see your hand.

We know this is a stone structure, but that's pretty much it.

We don't even know if we're underground or not.

"Rudeus, lights please."

As instructed, I take out a Spirit of Light scroll and used it to illuminate the area.

We saw a room 10 meters ahead.

"Ugh."

Cliff screams when he saw the room.

Bones scattered everywhere on the floor.

As expected of the Magic Continent, bones of various shapes, almost like they're fabricated.

"Looks like this was a prison."

Elinalise said after inspecting the bones. On what's left of the arms and legs rusted cuffs can be seen.

Cliff looks pained, placing his hand in prayer.

"Oh... Milis-sama please save these lost souls."

I imitate Cliff in prayer.

Namusanbou, namusanbou.

Rest in peace.

Sorry to disturb you. We'll leave quickly.

"Let's go."

Speaking of which, there are bones everywhere.

How many were jailed here?

They probably never expected that there's a magic teleportation circle just a wall away.

Wait, no, I remember Perugia only recently reconnected this abandoned magic teleportation circle.

In other words, they were moved here before the magic circle was repaired.

If that's true, it leaves a bad taste in my mouth.

"There's a ladder, let's head up."

There's a ladder at the corner of the room.

Even though there's prisoners, they weren't fenced in.

Thinking that, I notice some rusted hinges fallen on the floor.

Maybe a wooden door once, but worn away by decay after a few thousand years.

Em, oh well.

In front of the ladder is a metal lid.

It's a door that opens upwards. Basically, a lid.

Elinalise checks for traps before attempting to push it open. It wouldn't open.

Something heavy is pressing against it.

"Okay. Go, Zano-barobo. Open it!"

"R-Robo? Got it."

Zanoba puts his hands against the door and pushes hard.

A heavy groan, but the door starts to open, dust and soil come flying down.

"Ugh."

"I'll handle the soil, keep going."

"G-got it, Shisho."

With all his might, Zanoba pushes the incredibly heavy door.

I use magic to get rid of all the fallen soil.

The door opens.

Sunlight shines from above.

Looks like the door leads outside.

When the door opens enough to fit through, Elinalise sneaks under it and exits.

"It's clear."

After waiting for her signal, we head out as well.

Part 5

Outside is a steep slope.

Below the horizon a russet land.

Giant boulders scattered everywhere, a place of extremes with many highs and lows.

And on the far side, the Magic Continent special: a forest like fish bones.

And here and there lumbering Great Land Turtles.

How nostalgic.

"SO this is the Magic Continent...!"

Cliff gasps as he speaks, spying warily down the slope.

No city in sight.

Is Kishirika really around here?

We need to find the nearest town and head there.

But where the hell are we?

Maybe we should head back and check with Sylvaril first.

No, before that, let's investigate our surroundings.

"Cliff-senpai, the Magic Continent has a great many dangerous and herding magic beasts. Please be careful."

"Ah, I got it."

Cliff nods seriously.

This is a dangerous land.

If he treats it like the Central Continent or Milis, even capable warriors may die.

"No magic beasts around us. It's safe."

Of course Elinalise will never be that careless.

Neither was I... At least I think I wasn't.

Although I had Ruijerd back then, so maybe I still held some naive notions about the Magic Continent.

But my experience at Begaritto Continent should be useful.

"Also, I'm afraid you won't find many followers of Milis here. Their philosophy may be different, so please avoid getting in a fight with others for no reason."

"Oh. That, you're right. I know."

Maybe I'm being a little arrogant.

But Cliff has never been around the Magic Race before.

We need to avoid getting into confrontations for every little thing like Eris did.

"It's fine. Cliff doesn't even speak the Demon God language."

Elinalise adds in.

She doesn't either.

For the two years she spent traveling the Demon Continent, she almost exclusively relied on Roxy.

Well, she did learn all the vocabularies needed for H-stuff.

Cliff would probably faint if he finds out.

But that's the curse's fault too.

"Shisho!"

While wondering those things, Zanoba has climbed up a hill, shouting.

Does he even have careful in his vocabulary?

Of course not. Even falling off a cliff won't faze that guy.

Ah, oh well.

"What did you see!?"

Climbing as we said.

"Oh."

End of the slope is a steep cliff.

And behind the cliff a scene you couldn't help but stare.

"Wow, amazing..."

Cliff exclaims.

We stand atop a great crater.

A town stretches below us.

At the center of the crater a black-gold castle inside rests half ruined.

Surrounded by the huge town.

"So this is where he sent us..."

I recognize this city.

One of the Three Great Towns of the Magic Continent.

A crater-shaped natural wall prevents magic beasts from entering.

After nightfall, magic stones inside the crater illuminates the city.

I know the castle as well.

This was once the seat of the Great Demon Emperor Kishirika Kishirisu, destroyed in Laplace's war with the Demon Kings.

Once known as Old Kishirisu Castle.

Also, for me, a place of unhappy memories.

Rikarisu Town.

CHAPTER 6

SEARCH FOR KISHIRIKA

Part 1

Rikarisu Town.

Lots of memories here.

Even now, I remember it like yesterday.

My life as an adventurer in the Magic Continent started here, filled with memories of Ruijerd and Eris.

But in the end, we were chased out, leaving only bad memories behind...

But the experiences I gained here are good.

It's here I learned not to overthink the situation or try to do everything by myself.

We hike down the slope and head towards the edge of the crater until we reach an entrance.

Just as before, here stands a pair of guards.

Back then, in order to sneak Ruijerd in, we came in disguise...

"Hey, it's guarded. Is that a problem?"

"No. Cities in the Magic Continent basically welcome everyone in."

"But doesn't the security feel rather tight right now?"

As Cliff said, the guards look quite alert.

Jet black armor, full face helmet.

The armor looks sharp and ominous.

When I was at Rikarisu, the guards weren't so well equipped.

The equipment has changed over the years I suppose.

"Halt."

Just as we are about to enter, the guards stop us.

"What is it?"

"No, that woman over there..."

The guards stare at Elinalise.

Cliff steps in front of Elinalise as if to shield her.

Elinalise looks unfazed.

"What's wrong?"

"...What?"

The other guard pulls out a piece of paper and looks back and forth between it and Elinalise.

I sneak a peek. Drawn on it is a succubus-like beauty.

Tall, big breasted, long wavy hair.

It wasn't colored, but Elinalise shares some similarities.

But, the chest is off.

"Not her."

"Ah, nope."

With that said, the guard puts away the paper.

"Excuse me, proceed."

"Something happened?"

"None of your business."

I left quietly after I was refused.

"Looks like they're looking for someone."

"Yeah."

There's an escapee somewhere in town?

Well, nothing to do with us.

But we should be careful.

If we wander into an alley somewhere and meet a murderer, that'd suck.

"Well, now what?"

"Let's go to the Adventurer's Guild and exchange some money."

"Got it."

After a simple exchange, we follow the road ahead.

"Wow, amazing..."

Cliff exclaims as he sees the nearby open market.

As usual, it's full of life.

Merchants and adventurers of various races.

Lizard-like magic beasts ridden back and forth.

But the things going on are about the same as those in the markets around the Magic City Sharia:

Merchants and adventurers arguing, residents wandering to and forth, a beggar asking for charity from a merchant and getting kicked aside.

Same sort of things everywhere you go.

Even Cliff should be familiar with this sight, but seeing various races mixed together might be refreshing.

Must be different.

However, unexpectedly, black-clad soldiers are everywhere.

Whenever they spot Elinalise, without a pause, they'll take out some paper.

Since it's obviously someone different even from afar, they never come for questioning.

"Cliff-senpai, your wife is rather popular."

"Eh, Ehh... Is it alright?"

"As long as Elinalise-san hasn't done anything here before, it should be alright."

With that said, I stare at Elinalise.

She shrugs.

"Nothing I feel guilty about."

Elinalise looks unfocused.

She definitely did something she felt guilty about.

Part 2

The Adventurer's Guild is the same as always.
At worst, it has deteriorated slightly due to the ravages of time.
No, I remember it was always like this.

All eyes were on us when we entered.
How nostalgic.
Last time after a short act, we had the place in an uproar.
Thankfully, Ruijerd soon got in the act and we avoided a mess.

Soon, everyone lost interest.
A party of Long Ear Race and Human might be exotic, but a few rare specimens don't deserve the attention.

We head to the front desk and exchanged some Asura coins with Magic Continent ones.
Around 100 Green Mineral Coins worth, but I collected them without double checking.
Back then, I'd check the contents of my wallet everyday, even if there's only one or two pieces left. I have really changed.
No, I'm just a tad more affluent than before.

Also, we issued a request to the Adventurer's Guild for Kishirika's whereabouts.

"Petite girl, purple hair, bondage wear, self-proclaimed Great Empress of the Demon Realm. In particular, she habitually laughs like a maniac."

Since it's a search, ratings are low, but the reward is high.
I stick the request on the job board. Suddenly, I noticed at the edge of the job board an aging petition from the Fedoa Region Search Group.
The search group at Milis has already been disbanded, yet this petition still remains.
The contact person is still Paul at the Holy Kingdom of Milis.
At this rate, wouldn't someone end up traveling all the way to Milis for nothing?

I return to the front desk and change the contact to Alphonse at the refugee camp.
They probably will still accept refugees there.
Although my residence could work as well, honestly, I don't want to take care of people I don't know.

"Well, we're done here."

"Now what?"

After Cliff asked, I spent time thinking about our next move.

Of course, we shouldn't just sit around and wait. It's better if we do some digging ourselves.

We'll spend a week here collecting information.

Look for help and do leg work on our own, search carefully.

Ultimately, the Adventurer's Guild job request is just a safety net in case we missed Kishirika somehow.

"First, collect intel."

I check my surroundings.

A man walks up towards us.

A horse faced man.

I remember this guy well.

It's the guy that trapped us.

It's all his fault that we got kicked out of the city... well, not all his fault.

I know as well, back then, we broke the rules.

"Yo!"

The horse faced man, Nokopara, just like before, comes chatting full spirited.

To a guy like him, making conversation with new faces is part of the job.

Despite what I think, the person he's greeting is not me, but Elinalise.

"Long time no see! You and Roxy split up?"

Elinalise looks at Nokopara in surprise.

Not long after, probably when it finally clicks for her, she claps her hand.

"Ah, from Roxy's old party."

"...Eh?"

Roxy's old party?

What?

"Rudeus, please help translate. This is my... no, Roxy's old buddy."

Elinalise pushes me to face Nokopara.

8 years ago.

The guy that clung onto us.

Roxy's old buddy.

Old party member.

In other words, he was clinging onto Roxy too.

Why have I never heard anything about this?

"Oh, I am Nokopara. Do you understand me?"

He doesn't remember me from back then.

It can't be helped, after 8 years, I have grown up quite a bit.

Nokopara has grown old too... well, I can't really tell.

How horse-faces look when older, I can't really tell.

In turn, Nokopara probably can't tell human faces apart either.

"Yeah, Nokopara-san. I understand."

"Rudeus, he should be quite familiar with the situations in this town. Why not ask him to help collect information for us?"

"..."

This guy is good with intel, that I know.

He's very observant of others.

In that case, he should come in handy for us.

We were once pushed into a corner by him.

But we shamed him in public as well.

He might still be holding a grudge for that.

Instead of coming clean, I'm better off hiding my identity and taking advantage of him.

"I am Quagmire. Nice to meet you."

"Ah, Quagmire huh... Oh? Have we met before?"

"No, that's impossible."

If Eris was here, she'd probably kick his ass.

But I'll let bygones be bygones.

He never did realize that Ruijerd is a Supard.

And it was our misstep that caused the situation.
Besides, now is not the time to dig up the past.

"We're looking for someone. Will you assist us?"
"...How much you got?"

He pisses me off.
Well, I wouldn't want to work for free either.

"2 Green Mineral Coins. 4 if you find her."
"4!? D-done!"

Ah, too much.
It's been a while, I completely forgot about the situation here.
Ah, oh well.

"It's an emergency."
"Oh. If it's for Elinalise, I can do it for half."

Nokopara turns up his nose and smiles to himself.

Part 3

After I provide Nokopara the info on Kishirika, he said [We'll get in touch in half a day] and disappeared into the crowd.

"I'm surprised you held back."

Watching Nokopara leave, Elinalise speaks up.

"Eh?"

"I remember now. That guy tried to shake you down before."

"Wow, you even know about that."

"When I came by this town, I caught wind of it. Apparently, Nokopara tried to shake down [Dead End] and almost got killed. But I don't think Roxy heard of it..."

Elinalise knows.

Well, no reason that she wouldn't.

A Supard showing up in town would be big news.

"It's just an unfortunate event."

Things were going so well that I got carried away and fell on my face.

The way Nokopara takes advantage of others disgusts me, but I'm no saint myself.

Since Nokopara doesn't realize who I am, all is well.

"Anyways, I don't plan on settling the score with Nokopara. But if he crosses us again, that's a different story."

What's past is past, but I am not that generous.

Cross me again, and I'll make sure that's the last time.

"Say, Nokopara and Roxy in a party together, what's up with that?"

"Ah, about that-."

I feel a little troubled after hearing the story of Roxy and Nokopara.

Ah, such a nice guy back then, yet look at how he turned out.

Part 4

There's lots of stuff to get done in half a day's time.
First, securing accommodation.
This town has plenty of inns open for adventurers.
Simple inns for rookies, and luxury ones for high-rank.

This time, we selected one for high-rank adventurers.
I picked a high class inn mostly for its security.
It's a little pricey, but since prices are generally low at the Magic Continent, it wasn't very painful.

On the way there, we walked past Wolf Claw Inn.
That's the place we stayed in long ago.

By chance, we passed by three young rookies, chatting as they walk out of the inn.
It's a little late to head out for work right now, so they're probably going shopping.
Say, the other adventurers that lived here back then... Kuruto and people, what are they up to now?
Because of my misjudgment, one of them died. How are the other two doing?
No. It has been 8 years already.
They might already be dead.
But if we can meet again, I'd like to talk about old times with them.

Oh yeah.
I should go meet with the P-hunters.
Jalil and Veskel, right?
The petty criminals that specialize in lost pets.
Although I'm not looking for a pet this time, Kishirika is basically an animal. Maybe they can find her.

"Before that, let me drop by this place I know."
"As expected of Shisho, to be so well connected."
"I just know a few people."

Thinking about that, I head towards P-hunters' pet store.

It should be around here somewhere. Following vague memories of the area, I went ahead.

My memories are dubious, and the city changed.

Despite that, after spending so long in the area and following the landmarks, I can still recognize this place.

The location is right, but the store has changed.

It's a butcher's shop.

A guy with hedgehog head looks after the store. I went to check it out.

"Welcome."

"I remember this was a pet shop once. Do you know what happened?"

"Ah, Jalil? That guy's dead. Got killed 2 years ago taming a magic beast."

Eh, he died?

Seriously?

"And Veskel?"

"Veskel? She left a year ago. With Jalil dead, she can't do work no more."

Veskel is gone too.

Really, Jalil, dead?

I know that the Magic Continent is a cruel place, but hearing that an old friend has died is still rather depressing.

In the end, he did betray Ruijerd.

Even so, we did work together once.

I'd like to remain as friends.

"I took over the shop from Veskel. Do you know her?"

"Yeah, we met."

"Well then, let me give you a discount."

I also asked about Kishirika, and as pay, bought some Great Land Turtle jerky and left. Great Land Turtle meat still tastes as disgusting as always.

Part 5

For half a day, we busy ourselves in collecting intel.

Collecting intel by hand is not particularly efficient.
Particularly because I'm the only one that speaks the Demon God language.
So basically, only I could ask around.

If only Roxy were here.
Still, searching a town, one or two people won't make much of a difference.
When it comes to intel, let's count on the expert Nokopara instead.
With those thoughts, I continue to ask around...

"Petite, purple hair, bondage wear, self-proclaimed Great Empress of the Demon Realm, habitually laughs like a maniac. Have you met that girl before?"
"Ah, that kid. I have. But that was almost... a year ago."

Turns out I got a lot of responses.
Unexpected.
Truly unexpected.
With this, maybe it won't be too long before we find her.

"Score!"

Cliff raises his voice happily.
As if we already found her.
But Elinalise shakes her hand.

"But no one saw her recently?"

It's true.
They're all [About a year ago.]
Well, some also said [About half a year ago.]
Maybe she left already.

In that case, we should start asking [Where did she go?]

Rikarisu Town sits on the northeast corner of the Magic Continent.

For the time being, she would probably head southwest.
There's a mountain range to the southwest, in that case maybe... No, this is Kishirika after all.

Not that I know Kishirika very well.
But I got a feeling she's capable of anything.
If she doesn't follow the roads, then who knows where she could be.

"Let's go check in with Nokopara."
"It's only been half a day. I doubt even he could have found much..."

Regardless, we head back to the Adventurer's Guild.
We picked a table, and just when we were about to grab something to eat, Nokopara shows up.

"Yo. Waited long?"

Just like how he left, he came back smiling and full of energy.
No, I can't tell how happy a horse face is.
But he seems pretty happy to me.

"Sorry, I have yet to find the person, but I've got some intel for you."
"What did you hear?"

Only half a day for the eagle to land.
Basically, we already know all the information Nokopara found.

But as expected of Nokopara, he was able to summarize all the most common sightings, as well as where she was last spotted.
Not bad for half a day's work...
Rather, as part of his daily routine, he knows all the right people to ask.
Then, based on what info is needed, he picks the best candidates to ask, something like that.
That's talent too.

"Demon King-sama seems to be looking for the Great Demon Empress as well."
"Demon King?"
"Yeah. About a year ago, the Demon King from the adjacent territory traveled here."

Apparently, a Demon King currently resides at the center of Rikarisu Town, at Old Kishirisu Castle.

So all the black-clad soldiers here are her personal army. The riders too are basically her private guards.

"Don't tell me that Demon King is Badigadi?"

"No, not Badigadi-sama. It's Atofe-sama, older sister of Badigadi-sama, a very terrifying Demon King."

Badigadi has a sister?

A black amazon?

"Really scary?"

"Ah, she's a Demon King that fought in the Laplace Campaign after all. If you accidentally offend her, she might execute you on the spot."

I can't even imagine that when Badigadi is so easy going.

But if that's the case, then I should probably avoid her.

No, if she is related to Badigadi, then she might also be immortal too.

If she has lived since a long time ago, then maybe she knows of the cure to Doline syndrome.

I should try to get an audience with her and ask...

Whether she will see me is another question.

"Say, has Badigadi returned?"

"He has yet to return... Hey, watch your language when you talk about the Demon King-sama."

"Apologies."

Badigadi hasn't come back.

Who knows where he's wandering the world right now.

He's been gone for 8 years already.

Maybe wandering the world is a hobby of his.

I summarized the details to the others.

Zanoba, with a hand to his chin, says,

"The portrait looks nothing like her."

Now that he mentioned it, that portrait does look completely different from the Kishirika that I remember.

I know Kishirika was a kid.

I didn't notice when I checked the portrait, but that vixen looks quite like Kishirika.

Maybe once Kishirika grows older, that's how she will look.

Maybe Kishirika has grown in the past few years?

No, no.

We have witness reports of that girl.

In other words, that Demon King doesn't know that Kishirika is a kid?

Oh...

Maybe Nokopara would know.

"That portrait that the private guards have looks different from the actual Kishirika. What do you think?"

"Demon King-sama doesn't concern herself with petty details. So maybe she thought any age would do."

"Ah, I see."

Badigadi is whimsical as well.

Maybe Atofe is the same.

"Then, let's all check with Atofe-sama?"

I declare and get up.

But Nokopara starts to panic.

"Hey, hold on, forget it. Atofe-sama is really dangerous. You're better off not going."

"No, I must. I'll be careful not to offend her."

No problem?

I hope there won't be.

If something happens, then Zanoba will stand guard while I attack.

Just like with Badigadi, I'll hit and run...

Then, once I find Badigadi, he can mediate for us.

Well, that'll do.

"If we should meet, then allow me to help."

Zanoba stands up smiling.

He's a royalty as well, so arranging a meeting should be possible right?

If that's the case, then maybe we should've gotten Ariel to come instead...

Hold on, maybe like with Perugius, Zanoba is easier to get along with.

Since Ariel is always thinking about networking, she might be exposed and hated.

"Is Atofe-sama interested in the arts?"

"Eh? Arts? Em, who knows. Well, Demon King-samas all seem to have those sorts of interests."

Badigadi's interests... like what?

I don't think he has anything of the sort.

No, he's interested in beer?

Like really expensive beer?

Even though Atofe is a very scary Demon King, if she's anything like Badigadi, then we might get along.

"Anyways, let's go give it a shot."

With the talk over, Elinalise and Cliff stood up as well.

Part 6

An hour later.

We stand looking at the castle.

Conclusion?

Failure.

Zanoba takes the crest of Shirone. I translate for him to request an audience with Demon King.

"Never heard of that country. Atofe-sama is busy! No one is allowed!"

Denied.

Door slammed in our face.

Maybe Asura Kingdom, or Kingdom of the Dragon King, or Holy Kingdom of Milis would have been different.

But Shirone is a small kingdom, so it's impossible.

It's like expecting a Japanese to know the name of some country in Africa.

Especially when there was no appointment.

It's only natural.

"I'm sorry. My home country lacks the prestige."

Rather than getting angry at the blatant breach of etiquette, Zanoba is apologizing to me instead.

"No, I was inconsiderate."

"I thought this might happen..."

Zanoba said as he frowns.

Zanoba isn't much of a patriot, but to hear his country mocked in such a matter, I doubt he'll let it go.

"...Sigh, let's take a break."

Cliff leans on a wall nearby and sighs.

I still have some gas in the tank but...

"True, I'm a bit tired too."

Looking around, Zanoba is sweaty too.

It might miss, but he's also an indoor type. A day's exercise is hard on him too.

I also feel like my head is running slow.

Let's rest.

"Alright. Then let's go grab some grub."

We didn't have time for lunch.

The jerky was lacking as well.

Well, food here is hard to eat, so I don't have much appetite.

"Shisho, there's an open-air stall there. Let's just eat there. Is that alright with you two?"

Now that you mention it, for a while, we could smell barbecue in the air.

Following our nose, there's a heavily spiced Magic Continent specialty, open stall spicy barbecue skewers.

With a crowd of... 3 customers waiting in line.

"I don't mind, but eating while standing... isn't that against the rules?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

As they argue, Elinalise has already taken her place in the line.

"I'll hold a spot. Rudeus, go set up a place to sit somewhere."

"Will language be a problem?"

"For numbers, we can just use our hands."

That's true too.

There are ways to get around without knowing the language.

Following her instructions, with magic, I set up some chairs on the side.

Although eating standing up is fine, since we need to rest, we might as well sit down.

Although to be honest, I don't mind sitting on the ground either.

"I'll line up too."

Cliff and Elinalise line up together.
I finish with the preparations and sit down with Zanoba.

"Phew."

After sitting down, a day of exhaustion rushed onto me.
But sitting here like this, I start to feel like the entire day has been a waste of time.
We still don't know whether we can find Kishirika.
Even if we find her, we have no clue whether she knows anything useful.
Rather, I have a feeling the chances that she does is nigh.
Badigadi as well, although they have long lives, I think they rarely get ill.

"...Shisho, don't be too hard on yourself."

"Eh?"

"Nanahoshi's illness, Shisho doesn't have to feel so responsible for it."

I'm not responsible.

Right. That's true.

But, this is not an issue of responsibility.

This is what I want to do.

"That's true."

"But feeling homesick and wanting to go back, I can understand that a little. That's why I want to help."

"Really? I thought you were happy with the life you have now."

"Of course. But sometimes, I feel nostalgic for home. That's also true."

Zanoba feels homesick sometimes.

I thought he only had dolls on his mind, but I guess Zanoba is also someone's flesh and blood.

"...Nanahoshi tries so hard. Her home is definitely something important to her."

"The boy she likes, and her family too... They're all there."

Both are ordinary, but both are important.

Very, very important.

"Both of them are beyond me."

"For you, it's dolls."

I absentmindedly watch the other two while chatting with Zanoba.
Cliff and Elinalise.

Those two have changed so much from when we first met.

Cliff can't read the mood, but now he's more considerate of others.

Elinalise too, I'm fond of the time when she was busy chasing after boys.

If they ever split up, they probably would return to their true forms in a hurry.

"..."

The customer before Cliff ordered his skewers.

Probably to ask for change, a beggar in hood and rags went over, but that customer kicked him away.

Cliff looks angry when he spots this.

But Elinalise stops him, so no fight broke out.

Cliff is kind-hearted. He definitely will get something for the beggar.

As I expected, he bought an extra skewer and handed it to him.

The beggar devours the skewer as he thanks him.

Nom, nom.

Soon after he finished one, he brazenly begs Cliff for another, so Cliff bought a new one for him.

So moved that he's trembling, the beggar holds Cliff's hand.

Eh?

Deja-vu.

Say, that beggar, is he thanking Cliff in human language?

In that moment, the beggar suddenly laughs with a voice so loud that it can be heard from even over here.

"Faahahahaha!"

Throwing off her rags, she loudly declares!

"This one is called Kishirika Kishirisu! A.K.A. THE GREAT EMPRESS OF THE DEMON REALM! You have saved this one's life! It's fine if you ask for any one desire!"



I feel dizzy.

Part 7

Great Demon Empress Kishirika.
She looks just as how I remembered her.

Those knee-high kicks, skin-tight hot pants, and blouse.
Her pale skin, collarbone, waist, navel, and thighs.
Her characteristic thick, purple, wavy hair with goat horns.

Well, she's dirtier than before.
But without a doubt,
That's Kishirika Kishirisu.

"Faahahahah! Faahaha! Faahahahaha!"

Cliff looks dumbfounded.
Elinalise's eyes turn into dots. That's a first.
Me too, what just happened?

The only one calm is Zanoba.
Only him, with his hand on his chin said, [Oh, so that's Badigadi's lover.]

"..."

Pay it forward.
That idiom floats in my mind.

I think Cliff is the proof of those words.
Helping a beggar sounds easy, but not everyone would do it.
Ultimately, the other person's a beggar.
Raggy clothes, a strong stench whenever he approaches, skin covered in dirt, and blackened teeth.
You feel sorry for them, so you ought to buy them food. But do you really want to?

I won't.
I won't go as far as kicking her, but I don't have that kind of universal love.
But Cliff, he does.
The first time we met, I thought he was a petty bastard.

But in the future, he probably will become a great priest.
Viva la Cliff!

Okay, that's enough praise for Cliff.

Anyways, why is Kishirika begging here?

"Come! Don't hold back! Anything you desire! But before that, state your name!"
"Eh? Eh...? C-Cliff Grimoire."

Looking at the beggar turned Kishirika before him, Cliff looks to me for help.
Meanwhile, Kishirika makes a pompous pose and continues.

"Cliff! Treating this one to food is a great deed. This one hasn't ate for half a year already!"

I walk by and join the conversation.

"In that case, how about some more?"
"Oh! Really! You are truly generous! Truly a generous man!"

Then for a while, Kishirika continues to wolf down Great Land Turtle skewers.
Devouring everything, who knows how she managed to fit everything into that tiny body.
Nom, nom.

"Phew, this one is full! With that, this one can last a whole year!"

Kishirika slaps her tummy in satisfaction. She has wiped out the entire stall.
Selling so well, the stall owner must be happy too.
Next...

"Long time no see, Kishirika-sama."
"And you are!"

I bow in respect. Kishirika stares at me.

"Eh? Oh?"

Then her pupils spin, and she claps her hands.

"Oh! You! The human boy with the disgusting amount of magic power! This one remembers! This one gave the boy a demon eye. The name is, oh yeah, eh... Ru, ba, Rumba... Rumba. Long time no see!"

"It's Rudeus Greyrat."

I'm no robot vacuum cleaner.

"Long time no see, Rudeus... You sure grew. How was it, after that, how was life?"

Kishirika slaps me on the thigh once she got close enough.
Like a manager from somewhere.

"Ah yes, the demon eye Kishirika-sama gifted me has saved my life many times!"
"Faahahahah! Is that so, is that so!"

Kishirika nods happily.
How simple.
So easy.

"But, this one can only reward one person! Just one!"

Kishirika points at Cliff.

"You, Cliff Grimoire. State your desires."
"..."

Pointed out by Kishirika, Cliff swallows.

Suddenly I remember.
The reward from Great Demon Empress Kishirika Kishirisu, a demon eye.
This is something well known in this world.

Cliff has his own goals in the future.
A demon eye will surely help with his magic tool research.
If it's me, I would think so too.
Of course.
Unless?

"T-then, please tell me the cure to Drain Syndrome."

"Eh?"

"A friend of mine fell ill to that. She's stable right now, but probably won't get better. If you know, please tell me."

Phew.

My mind wandered. I'm really sorry.

When we get back, I'm definitely treating Cliff to a big meal.

"Em, Drain Syndrome eh? That name sure is nostalgic. People still getting sick from that, now that's shocking!"

I glance at Zanoba and nod.

Looks like Kishirika has heard of it before.

"Then, what about the cure?"

"Of course. For that, just take some leaves of Sokasu Grass and make tea with it. Then it'll come out with poop."

I can feel a smile growing on my face.

Good.

Even though Kishirika might be wrong, but we finally have something.

Make tea with Sokasu Grass leaves.

Basically make a concoction.

"Sokasu Grass? Never heard of it before. Where can we find it?"

"Em... Phantom Capital Maio." [14]

"Phantom Capital Maio?"

Crap.

Any city with the word Phantom in it is basically impossible to find.

Like a place you can only visit in your dream, or can only find in the shifting desert...

"North of the Red Dragon Mountain Ranges, at a valley named Red Dragon Tail in Dragon Tail Cave. Sokasu Grass grows in the deepest reaches of that cave."

"Dragon Tail Cave."

With that, we have more work to do.

No, that's good.

Not bad at all.

Better than not finding Kishirika and wandering the world for years.

Eh?

But is there even a place called Red Dragon Tail on the Red Dragon Mountain Ranges?

"Where is that place?"

"Oh, during the second Human-Demon Great War, Dragon God and Fighting God cut a hole in the ground and it disappeared."

"...Eh?"

In other words,

It's gone.

Say, that differs from the story I knew.

The hole in the ground, isn't that because of the battle between Kishirika and the Golden Knight?

No, but Kishirika doesn't look particularly strong...

Well, forget it.

When it comes to tales and legends, the truth often gets twisted when convenient.

What's important is the Sokasu Grass.

"Say, is Sokasu Grass extinct?"

"No, the Dragon Tail Cave is only where it was originally discovered."

Kishirika shakes her head slowly.

Originally discovered, so it may still be growing somewhere?

"Sokasu Grass grows in the depth of caves where the sun never shines."

Depth of caves where the sun doesn't shine.

Like Labyrinths?

Another Labyrinth?

In that case, then I'll get enough bodies this time.

20... No, I might place enough bounty to assemble 100 adventurers or so.

"Thus, under this one's instruction, Demon Kings everywhere have been growing them under their own castles."

"..."

"After all, Sokasu Grass is delicious. Moreover, drinking them leads to long life. Even Immortal Demons drink them. Faahahahaha!"

"..."

In other words.

That's it?

They're growing under the castle?

Not only that, but as ingredients for high grade tea, then we can probably find them everywhere.

"Faahahahaha! You thought you wouldn't find them? Did I guess right? Too bad! Even Kishirisu Castle has them! Faahahahaha!"

This guy, I really want to kick her.

As I thought so, Cliff takes a step forward with clenched fists.

"You!"

"Hold on Cliff-senpai! Wait until she's told us everything!"

"Oh, okay."

Shit, the truth came out.

Besides, if the castle has it, then it's fine.

Or rather, it's perfect.

I'm not happy that I'm being toyed with.

This is an area I have to improve on.

But stay calm.

Keep my head down.

"Then, Kishirika-sama. That Sokasu tea. Can we have some?"

"Sure! But there's just one problem."

"Problem?"

"Um. Right now, in Kishirisu Castle is an annoying person. She's an idiot, but an annoying idiot. This one has been hiding from her for half a year already... Ah!"

Kishirika looks behind me.

"Em?"

I look up and behind me.

Over there, black-clad soldiers.

5, 6, 7... over 20 in all.

Even more from the street and alleys...

Almost 30 in all, and we're surrounded.

Part 8

The soldiers watch us intimidatingly.

Elinalise takes a step forward with a hand on the sword on her waist.

There's cold sweat on her forehead.

No matter what, there are too many enemies to deal with.

Crap, we have nowhere to run.

Do I grab Zanoba and Cliff and fly away?

Do I leave Kishirika and Elinalise behind?

What do I do?

The front-most soldier among them steps forward.

With a hoarse but forceful voice he said,

"We are the Gaslow Region ^[15] Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe's Private Guard."

In fluent Human language.

So we will work with them, probably.

"Atofe-sama commands: Hand Kishirika-sama to us, and head immediately to the castle."

Hearing him, the black-clad riders behind him compare the portrait with Kishirika the person. Eh? They seem riled up.

As Nokopara expected, the portrait was wrong. The one that ordered it was sloppy.

But, even if the portrait was wrong, if she yells out Kishirika like that, she will probably get exposed.

"What if we don't?"

The moment Elinalise asked quietly, all the soldiers drew their swords.

The sound of swords unsheathing clatters.

The chorus of sounds becomes ear-deafeningly loud.

"Kill them all."

I can't tell the strength of an opponent just by looking.

But even I have quite a bit of experience under my belt.
Even I can tell when an opponent is obviously strong.
The private guards are, without a doubt, full of incredible people.
Far stronger than the typical rider group can match.

"No, don't. If they catch this one, then who knows how they'll treat this one? Atofe is the most stupid among the the Demon Kings!"

Hearing Kishirika makes me frown.

If Atofe doesn't have a plan for dealing with Kishirika after capturing her, then why capture her in the first place?

Besides, I have no reason to meet with Atofe anymore.

I should just run...

But the medicine is under the castle right?

Then maybe we should go along... But I've never seen it before. I have no idea what it looks like.

While I'm hesitating, the soldier removes his helmet.

"Please."

A white-haired, battle-wary old man.

With a gentle smile, he bows his head.

"If everyone doesn't come, then we'll be punished by Afote-sama. We definitely won't hurt you, so please..."

I'm a Japanese man that can say... no.

Not like before.

But after such a humble request, I can't help but feel soft-hearted.

"No, don't listen to him. He's Atofe's dog."

Cold sweat dripping down from Kishirika's face.

Seems like she's hiding something.

"I overheard your conversation. Sokasu Grass is grown in Gaslow Region, and we also know the cultivating techniques. If necessary, we can even prepare saplings for you. So please come with us..."

The old soldier bows his head.

I can feel his sincerity.

Even though he can move us forcefully, instead, he requested so humbly.

I'm not too close with Kishirika, but I do know of Demon Kings like Badigadi.

These underlings must have it tough.

"Say, why does Kishrika-sama hate Atofe-sama so much? There must be a reason that you've been hunting Kishirika-sama for half a year. Can you tell me?"

"A year ago, here, Atofe-sama was supposed to receive a shipment of wine from Gekura region, but Kishirika drank them all."

"Oh."

The old soldier continues.

"Atofe-sama was really looking forward to that wine and got really angry. She ordered the private guards from our home country here to investigate and capture her. We don't know what Kishirika looks like, so she gave us this portrait, and we have been searching for her ever since..."

"So that's what happened, I understand."

I knocked out Kishirika with magic myself.

CHAPTER 7

AUDIENCE WITH THE IMMORTAL DEMON LORD

Part 1

Old Kishirisu Castle.

Its appearance, in a nutshell, is of a demon castle.

Constructed from special masonry, a black-gold castle.

Its one glaring flaw is a gigantic hole in the castle tower.

Although not as sophisticated as Perugia's Sky Castle, it is still a very beautiful structure.

It's probably more desirable for those interested in the practical.

Normally it serves as a tourist attraction, open to the public, a castle that charges an admission fee.

Apparently divided into tourist section and resident section.

We're brought to an audience hall.

Not the great throne room that's open to the public.

A narrow and practical audience hall.

In this narrow hall, black clad soldiers line up shoulder to shoulder.

A tight squeeze, and hot too.

And then, on the jade throne in this stuffy hall, no one's there.

I have been waiting for over two hours here.

Outside, the sun has set long ago.

Although standing isn't much of a torture, but would it hurt if they prepare a seat for me?

By the way, right now only Zanoba and I are present.

Elinalise and Cliff were led away by some soldiers underground to gather the medicine.

"Hey, where is Atofe-sama?"

"I told you, we already called for her."

"This is taking too long, don't tell me she left town already..."

"She's loose with time, even inside the castle she might be a day late."

"But it's not good if we keep the guests waiting..."

"You there, be quiet."

The soldiers whispering among themselves.

A rather uninhibited bunch.

Somehow looking at them like this is rather reassuring.

When I checked, the old soldier has been staring at us.

"Atofe-sama will arrive soon, please hold on for a little more. By the way, don't ask for a reward."

"Ha?"

"We won't be able to help if she offers you a reward."

"Eh... Okay, I understand."

I nod candidly.

Even though I don't know what the reward might be.

Well, I wasn't planning for a reward in the first place.

A reward for selling out Kishirika, I don't want something so wicked.

Kishirika is currently tied up, squirming on the floor like a caterpillar.

Looks like punishments are in store for her. Spankings? Scrub the toilet? Hopefully nothing too serious...

Regardless I should watch my words.

The opponent is a Demon King.

The only ones I have met so far are Badigadi and Kishirika.

If those two get angry... well?

Probably not a good thing.

"Out of the way!"

Suddenly, a sound from the back.

I turn around to look and see a woman standing there.

Out of all that I have seen so far, that woman is the most demon-like of all.

Blue skin, white hair.

Crimson eyes, bat wings.

And then, from her forehead, a pair of great horns.

Her body is clad with black armor like the soldiers.
No, her armor looks well worn, far more than the soldiers'.
Covered in scars, all the decorations peeled off.
It has seen its share of battles.

Hanging off her waist, a great sword too big to imagine for her slender wrists.
Even its scabbard looks more stylish than the soldiers'.

Not particularly tall.
About normal for a mature woman.
A little taller than Ariel, a little shorter than me, around there.

But the thing really worthy of note.
Is the unspeakable anger and killing intent radiating from her.
A difficult to explain sense of violence.
Basically, kind of like Eris.

Like a female knight.
No, more appropriately a female knight commander.
Probably better I avoid her bad side.

"Did you not hear me? Out of the way!"
"Ah, yes."

Following her instruction, I made way for her.

"Good."

The female knight commander flicks her hair, unceremoniously walks up to the throne, and turns around.
Unsheathing from her waist the great sword, she slams it on the ground standing arrogantly.
Then, after a deep breath, said.

"It is I, Immortal Demon King Atoferatofe Raibaku."
"... Eh?"

「オレが不死魔王

アトーフエラトーフエ・ライバツクだ！」



While I was bewildered, the black clad soldiers hurriedly raise their swords in salute.
All, except one adjacent to the throne.
The old soldier from before.

"Atofe-sama! Why did you come from over there? How many times do I need to remind you? When you arrive at the throne, come from the back."

"I have decided that the front is better."

"Don't be so reckless!"

"Do you know? After an arduous journey to challenge the Demon King, the moment when the hero comes face to face with the Demon King at the throne, that feeling is exhilarating."

"So what! Think of how disappointed your father, one of the five Great Demon Kings, would be! Not only that, think of your husband Raibaku-sama!"

"Shut it!"

Atofe raises her sword, faster than the eye can see, swings at the old soldier.

The old soldier instantly tries to parry, but it was too late. His helmet flew off, and collapsed.

The black clad soldiers around him hurry over to help.

"Don't be so angry in front of guests! Your dead father will roll in his grave!"

The helmet rolls in front of me.

In the dead center it has split in two.

What terrifying power.

Nonchalantly I take a look at it, the interior is covered in blood.

"Ugh!"

Eh?

Ah?

Did she cut his head...

Don't tell me, that guy, he's...

Dead?

"I get it. Be more considerate next time."

While I was thinking, the old soldier stands up like nothing happened.

Smoke coming from his head as he bows to Atofe.
Don't tell me, he's also from the immortal clan?
Or rather, they are all?

"That's fine. Alright, let's start from the beginning."
"Okay!"

Atofe sheathes her sword and takes the Highlander pose.
The old soldier takes a helmet offered by another, and stands at the head of the troops.
Then, once more, the soldiers straighten up and raise their swords in salute.

"It is I, Immortal Demon King Atoferatofe Raibaku."

Zanoba kneels down on the floor, his head in a bow, I follow suit.
I'll be fine as long as I copy Zanoba, probably.

"First, allow me to thank you. Thanks to your assistance, we were finally able to catch that idiot Kishirika."

Atofe said while looking at Kishirika.
Rolled up like a sausage, she stares at the ground, resigned to her fate.

I feel a bit sorry for her.
Throwing her under the bus after helping us out, but it can't be helped.
We have our own problems.

"I don't have a portrait of this one when she's younger, so the search was a waste of time, but we finally found her!"

Ah, so that really was the case.
How careless.

"Well then..."

Still in that pose, Atofe stares off somewhere.
Then, nothing happens.

5 minutes passed.
Still in that pose, unmoving.

Like her breaker has tripped.

"Moore, now what?"

"Reward."

Looks like she forgot her lines.

Also, that old soldier is apparently Moore.

Like he's about to make a "muhaha muhaha" laugh at any moment. ^[16]

"Ah, right. They deserve a reward."

Atofe suddenly said.

"No, reward is unnecessary."

I said the refusal I have prepared.

Everything said so far are merely ceremonial.

That's why Moore told me to not go for a reward earlier.

Despite what I thought, Atofe instead stamps her feet.

"You mean a reward from me isn't good enough?"

Atofe glares at me with killing intent.

My legs begin to quiver.

That killing intent is the real deal.

Not like Rinia's or Pursena's.

More like Orsted's.

"No, no, it would be an honor."

I better not get on her wrong side.

If she wants to give us something, I better just shut up and accept it.

Like that I start looking for excuses.

"What will be our rewards?"

Hearing this, satisfied Atofe squints her eyes.

"Strength."

Strength.

Strength?

It'd be a lie if I say I don't want it.

But Moore-san told me to refuse it.

Maybe I should change the topic and tell her that we need to leave once my friends got the tea.

"I award you the honor of joining and training with my private guards!"

"Eh!"

What?

So she isn't going to put a hand on my forehead and unlock my hidden potential.

Or give me a demon eye like Kishirika?

"You are a bit soft, but after 10 years of training, you definitely will reach that level."

"Ah, em."

"I will train you day and night for the next 10 years. What an honor, right?"

10 years, training day and night...

No, I have wives and a kid at home, that kind of training I have to pass on.

It's true, if I train for the next 10 years, I can definitely get stronger.

But I'm not about to throw everything else away just for strength.

Abandoning the home I have to protect, for what?

I look over to Moore-san, he shakes his head to resign.

What do I do?

No, I have to refuse her.

I don't want to join some private guards.

"I'm very sorry, but this honor is beyond me."

"No need to be polite! Go, get a suit of armor and contract for him!"

Several of the private guards left as Atofe instructed.

"The strongest armor of the Magic Continent, the best training of the Magic Continent, and the most famed private guard of the Magic Continent. There's no greater honor

than that. Although once contracted you can never defy me, but it's not like you could even if you didn't. Doesn't that make you happy?"

Cannot be defied...

I'm not happy at all.

But of all the Demon Kings I have met thus far, this is the Demon-ist.

I guess in some ways, having a chance to meet a Demon King like this, is something to be happy about.

Wait, did all the private guards get forced into a contract like this?

"No, I must refuse. I have family at home, so I cannot stay 10 years here."

"... Don't mind the family. I haven't seen my son for over a hundred years. No news is good news."

So I have to be separated for 100 years too?

Don't joke around.

"F-for humans, 10 years is a very long time. I told my family I'll be back soon. And..."

"And?"

Atofe twitches her forehead.

She doesn't look very happy.

"And I have a sick friend waiting. I need to hurry to find a cure for her and return. There are also many other things that must be done. I cannot just think of my own strength right now."

"Shut it!"

Atofe shouts in anger.

Terrifying, so terrifying.

Truly terrifying.

What? Why?

Why does she have to shout?

"Are you joining the private guard, or are you not? What will it be? Give a clear answer!"

"I, I must refuse."

After my answer, Atofe turns stiff.
Her cheeks turn red.

"Why? Why do you refuse?"

Eh?
Didn't I just give a bunch of reasons?

"Em..."

At this moment, Zanoba suddenly steps in.
I glance back, he's a face of calm.
Ah, the whole time we have been speaking Demon God, so he doesn't know the conversation.

What should we do?
How do I convince Atofe?

I look around.
Without realizing it, the mood in the room has changed.
The sympathy coming from the soldiers has congealed into something strange.
Also, feeling a little alienated.

"You see!"

Kishirika suddenly yells out.

"That one is an idiot. Don't get involved with her. You can't talk sense to her."
"Shut it! I am not an idiot!"

Atofe suddenly roars and unsheathes her sword.

"That's right. You treated me like an idiot! You said you want a reward, then you said you don't! You played with my head like an idiot!"

Then she starts to head menacingly toward us.
Eh?
What?

Hey, calm down.

"Atofe-sama! We're inside, please calm down!"

"I am not an idiot! I'm not!"

Swinging her sword wildly, she angrily approaches us, but the black clad soldiers try to stop her.

"Stand aside."

Atofe sends the soldiers flying like a Russell Snow Plow Train.

Ah, crap.

Do I attack with magic?

No, if I attack now it just escalates the situation.

"I'll handle this."

During my moment of hesitation, Zanoba stands up and takes a step forward.

"Hah!"

Zanoba grabs Atofe tightly by her wrist.

Atofe, thinking she can send Zanoba flying like the rest of them, continues ahead.

But, as expected of the strength of a miko, Zanoba manages to stop Atofe's advance.

"Oh! You are unexpectedly strong!"

Atofe smiles in wide eye admiration at Zanoba.

As if to admonish her, Zanoba speaks.

"Let's calm down. It was not our intention to bother you. It's all a misunderstanding."

"Quit saying words I don't understand!"

Atofe ignores Zanoba's words.

Rather, more like she can't understand human language.

Atofe swings at Zanoba's foot with her sword, and when it doesn't work, she exclaims.

"Oh, you're tough. Wearing a particularly strong touki! Interesting!"

While shouting those words, Atofe cuts off her own arm that was held by Zanoba.
No hesitation.
Her own arm.
Just because it was a hassle, she cut it off.

"MMph!"

The moment it separates from Atofe, the arm dissolves into soft chunks of meat.
Zanoba lets go, and the meat chunks splatter on the ground.
The meat squirms near Atofe, sticking to her arm.
Then, in an instant, reform into its old shape.
Just like Badigadi.
Physical damage is useless.

"I am the Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe Raibaku! Wife of the original North God Kalman Raibaku! I shall show you the true North God Style!"

Atofe raises her great sword ready.
Zanoba clenches his fist, is he really going to fight her?

"..."

In this moment, I feel a chill down my spine.
Not good.
I have a bad feeling. Zanoba will die.

Zanoba is a miko.
Typical attacks won't faze him.
But he is not invincible.

Even that Dragon God Orsted can be hurt.
This world has no absolutes.
Zanoba is also weak against fire.
He may be strong against blunt force, but it's not completely immune.

"Grr."

I immediately begin to gather magic.
As fast as possible, as hard as possible.

Stone Cannon... won't be enough.
But my magic has also improved from back then.

"Wuhahaha! Die! North God Style Secret..."
"Electric!"

Purple lightning flies from my palm to Atofe.
It snaps in an instant.
Atofe falls backward.

"Ugh!"

Falling back, the great sword slips from her hand.
Meanwhile, a numbness from my left hand, but it should be fine.
I didn't put enough magic into it to kill.

"Ha!"

Zanoba isn't giving Atofe any room to spare.

"Kaboom!"

Zanoba's steel fist hits Atofe in the face.
Instantly Atofe's head crumbles, flying off in a beautiful parabola.
Flings past the throne.
With crumbling sounds breaking the back wall.
She flew out of the castle.

"A-Atofe-samaaaa!"

The black-clad soldiers swarm toward the hole in the wall.

"Eh, oops... I was trying to protect Shiso and moved without thinking. Is she dead?"
"No, I don't think she can."

Well, she is an Immortal Demon King.
Problem is, what do we do now?

"Wow, they actually did it."

"Did they really..."

"What just happened?"

We are surrounded by some 20 black clad soldiers.

Bickering among themselves, they have us surrounded.

Now that we knocked off their master, of course they have to do something.

"Ha."

I raise my staff.

This is my responsibility.

This happened because of what I said.

...No, was I wrong?

I don't think I did anything wrong... Eh?

"..."

But the black clad soldiers did not raise their swords. They're only looking.

"You..."

Zanoba in a fighting pose.

Maybe he should grab a weapon too.

But right now we don't have the luxury to look for one.

Is there a wooden pole they're not using?

Moore approaches us.

Representing the private guards, he speaks to me in Demon God language.

"Let me ask you again, do you want to be our comrades?"

"No, we don't."

I answered him clearly this time. Moore replies.

"Master likes strong people. After getting stopped by such a strange power, then sent flying out the castle with one punch, she will definitely want to keep you."

Are all Demon Kings of this world like this?

Can't they be more serious?

Still, the black clad soldiers don't look like they plan to capture us.

All they said after seeing Atofe fly off was [Wow!] [Atofe-sama really did it this time!]
[Haha!] That kind of banter.

"We private guards will not move unless instructed. But once commanded... we cannot refuse."

After Moore said that, many among the private guards look sharply at us.
Nothing funny about a group that does nothing unless they're told.
But we should be thankful that this is the case.

"Afote-sama probably won't let you get away given the situation."

"What happens after she catches us?"

"Probably force you to duel her."

"..."

"And when you lose, force you into a contract while unconscious. Once contracted, you can never defy Afote-sama again."

"T-that contract, how long does it last?"

"Until you die."

Gulp, I can hear the sound of me swallowing.

"But every 10 years, you get a 2 year break."

2 year break every 10 years.

So like a day off every 5.

But somehow that doesn't feel very restful.

"Most of the people here volunteered to join Atofe-sama's private guards, but many didn't. Especially the Human Race ones. It's rough. We can sympathize."

Among the private guards, a few droop their head.

So like us, they also felt like they got forced into the contract.

The contract is a euphemism for forced slavery.

So that's what happened, when Moore warned me to not take a reward, that's the reason...

He should have explained it better.

No, I can't blame him.
It's my fault for not asking.
I wanted to be careful, but I was careless from the start.

"... What's our chances in the duel?"

"Oh, chances? Do you think you can beat our master, who has lost only to North God Raibaku and Demon God Laplace in the last 5000 years?"

Oh, basically zero.

Immortal is in her name. Her durability probably matches that of Badigadi's.

No, she's probably better than Badigadi when it comes to fighting.

Badigadi never used North God Style or anything.

At least, he never did when we practiced.

"If it was a tie, what happens?"

"Rematch if an enemy, mutual respect if a friend."

In my situation.

Probably a rematch.

Feels like I already made myself an enemy.

Then, after a couple fights, I'll definitely lose eventually.

"T-then, what should we do..?"

"Run away."

Moore says bluntly.

"Your friends should have gathered enough Sokasu Grass by now. Under the castle is a tunnel out the town. Please escape from there."

The black clad soldiers around us plead.

"Don't follow our footsteps."

"If you ever head to the Holy Kingdom of Milis, please go to Wako Village..."

"Idiot, stop that. You can head back in 7 years."

"But..."

That sort of grieving coming from behind us.

Eh, I'll pretend I didn't hear anything.

I don't know even know where Wako Village is.

I start running out as I thank the soldiers.
Incidentally, I caught a glance of Kishirika.
She pleads with her eyes.
Now, she and I are the same, both fugitives.

"Can I bring Kishirika-sama with me?"
"...Well, our command was only to capture her."

The private guards decide to overlook this too.
Looks like Atofe never commanded them to prevent Kishirika from escape.
What happened to punishing her?
How easygoing.

Quickly I burn off the ropes tying up Kishirika.

"Ohh. Thank you very much! This one will definitely repay you!"

We escaped from the throne room.

Part 2

We made contact with Elinalise and Cliff inside the castle.

Carrying a sack full of tea leaves on their back, and each with a sapling in their hands. Ocher colored leaves, reminds me of shriveled aloe.

"Because they're weak against sunlight, they must be grown underground. I also got a notebook of instructions, but I can't read them."

"I can have Roxy take a look at it after, let's hurry."

"What happened?"

I explain to them the situation.

Elinalise has a [I knew this would happen] look on her face.

"I heard something like this before. Like Kishirika gives demon eye, Badigadi gives wisdom, and Atoferatofe gives strength."

"If you knew, you should have told us!"

"I don't understand Demon God language, maybe you should have translated better."

Ah, true, I was at fault too.

But I am not a translator.

I don't know what I'm supposed to do.

"No time to fight. Hurry and run. Then, that underground tunnel? Should we go?"

I come back to my senses after hearing Zanoba.

Right, right now Atofe may have already healed the face Zanoba smashed open, and is on the way to kill us.

"No, better avoid going underground."

A voice from behind my legs.

When I look back, Kishirika has been staring at me.

When we last met, we were roughly the same height, but now I can't help but stare down at her.

"This one didn't say anything earlier, because this one was mad of your betrayal, but Badi destroyed that tunnel during the Laplace Campaign. It hasn't been fixed yet."

"Really?"

"Really. That guy is a liar. Moore lies to help Atofe. He's basically her right hand. He might have said that, but he's probably planning something once you start to fight Atofe."

Even if Kishirika is lying, that sounds plausible.

Moore wants to deceive us and capture us underground.

That bastard...

... But he was kind enough to not attack us immediately.

And he kindly prepared cultivation notes for the herbs for us too.

Betraying that kindness, pissing off Atofe, that's all my fault.

I should just hand over Kishirika and cleanly refuse the reward.

Maybe they would let me go.

Although Moore might grumble about Atofe, he's definitely not on our side.

"But if that's the case, then why not catch us right then."

"That's Atofe you're talking about. She definitely wants to catch us herself."

I see.

It's just a game.

As a confidant of the Demon King, this is part of the job.

Do the other soldiers know?

Maybe some did, and some didn't.

"I understand. Then, we escape from above?"

"Yes. There shouldn't be any inspections right now."

Inspections at the entry points.

Indeed, with the private guards all inside the castle, there shouldn't be any inspections.

"Perhaps things changed when Kishirika-sama was in hiding. Maybe they have already fixed the tunnels?"

"If that's what you think, then either way is fine right?"

True.

Is the enemy above or below ground?

Um.

"Elinalise-san, which would you pick?"

"I definitely won't pick the path that might be blocked."

"Zanoba?"

"Narrow areas are easier to fight in."

"Cliff?"

"I, I pick above ground. I hate dark places."

It's decided.

Democratic rules.

"Then let's escape above ground. Elinalise take the front. Please lead us straight to the magic teleportation circle. Cliff and Zanoba in the middle, and I'll take rearguard. Zanoba and I will handle our baggage."

I take what Elinalise was carrying.

Better to let us hold it than them.

I can use magic, so I don't need much mobility. Zanoba won't mind a little weight.

Cliff isn't very strong, so better off if he doesn't carry anything.

"What about this one?"

"Your majesty, you can sit with Zanoba's luggage."

"Understood."

As instructed, Kishirika climbed up Zanoba like a small animal.

I was kidding...

AAh, oh well. That's probably the safest.

"Alright, let's go!"

We run out the castle.

From within, the sound of [Moooreeee! Chase themmm!] can be heard loudly.

Terrifying.

Part 3

Desperately we ran through the night streets.
Although it ought to be dark now, it's actually quite bright.
Brilliant lights pour down the cliffs of the crater.

But choosing above ground was right for now.

Not a single black clad soldier in sight.
No one chasing behind us either.

Just as Kishirika predicted.
They are probably searching the tunnels right now.
No, maybe Atofe gave up already.
Impossible. Think about it, we even have Kishirika with us.
Atofe has no reason to give up the chase.

We ran through the main road, passing by the Adventurer's Guild.
Nokopara is probably still inside.

I never expected to be heading back already.
Our rooms have been paid for.
Our change is still inside.
It's unfortunate, but not a big loss.

We passed the empty marketplace.
Briefly, I spot the alley where we dyed Ruijerd's hair.
Back then we ran out of town just like this.
All in all, not a single happy memory from this place.

We came to the city entry, a crack in the crater.
No black clad soldiers, but there are guards.
A lizard head and a pig head.
They watch us but don't show any suspicion. We easily passed.
We're almost there.

We follow along the edge of the crater.

"Ehh? Where are we going?"

"A magic teleportation circle we used."

"Oh. Magic teleportation circle. That thing's still there? But, em.. Oww, This one bit its tongue..."

We marked the location on the way out.

We'll be fine.

It's a little dark, but Elinalise won't make a mistake.

Make a left turn on the mark, then head straight uphill. We stop our steps.

"Well, well, it's about time."

Up the slopes.

The entry way to the magic teleportation circle.

Atofe stands proudly there.

Around her around 10 black clad soldiers.

Another hole can be seen near the magic teleportation circle entrance.

Don't tell me, the underground tunnel exits... here?

"As expected of Moore. It's just as he said. I'll have to handsomely reward him."

Were we tracked?

No, they even got here before us.

They even knew where we are going?

"How, how impressive... How did you catch up so quickly?"

"Hah, easy when you can fly. I can see you running."

Atofe flexes her wings as she speaks.

"Moore has arrived."

I turn to look. Black clad soldiers appear near the corner of the crater.

Atofe follows from above.

Ten black clad soldiers follow from below.

And more follow above ground.

Attack from three sides.

... If you think about it, it only makes sense.

They're not Inspector Zenigata, ^[17] of course they'll split up to search.

Not just that, they knew where we were heading, so none of the paths would work.

The black clad soldiers behind us have us surrounded.

With the escape route cut, there is no escape.

"Moore. Well done. It's just as you said."

"If you think so, then listen to my request."

"Refused."

After the short conversation, Atofe claps her hand.

Thus, the black clad soldiers, all together, unsheathe their swords.

"Well then..."

Atofe takes a step forward, her sword unsheathed.

Then, from the high ground with sword pointing she speaks.

"Wahahaha! I am the Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe Raibaku. Defeat me and people shall call you a hero! Lose to me, you shall become my puppet, follow my every command until you die!"

A grim smile.

An overwhelming murderous intent.

The Atofe who's shorter than me looks like a 5-meter tall giant.

"..."

Sorry, Sylphy.

I might not get back.

CHAPTER 8

DUEL WITH THE IMMORTAL DEMON LORD

Part 1

Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe.

She is a very famous Demon Lord.

Her first appearance in history is the second Human-Demon Great War.

[5 Great Demon Kings] Immortal Nekurosu Rakurosu's daughter, shock troop of the Demon Race.

Low intelligence, but wields tremendous battle prowess and tenacity, a cruel and feared Demon Lord.

But, perhaps because of her low intelligence, her supply route was cut.

Captured by humans, she was sealed.

Her revival happened before the Laplace Campaign.

Demon God Laplace revived her personally, and she became his most feared Demon Lord. After the Laplace Campaign, defeated by North God Karuman, she surrendered.

It is said, that North God Karuman and Demon Lord Atofe had a child, who became North God Karuman II.

It is also said, that North God Karuman taught Demon Lord Atofe everything he knew of the sword.

And it is said, that North God Karuman II's sword art was taught by none other than Demon Lord Atofe herself.

In summary, Atofe is a veteran of uncountable battles, a protege of the original North God, and also immortal.

We're screwed.

Part 2

Atofe before us.
Black clad soldiers surround us.
Our retreat blocked, Atofe eagerly brandishing her sword.

"Alright, come at me, all four of you."

Atofe did not attack.
Carefully wielding her sword, she is diligently observing us.
Her eyes are her real weapon.
With her strength, devastating us is not out of the question.

"... I won't be so naive this time. I remember well."

With that said, her glare alternates between Zanoba and me.
Vigilant.
Zanoba's special strength, and my lightning strike.
Even a Demon Lord cannot avoid our attacks.
But she now looks completely unscathed.
She completely recovers even after taking a Zanoba punch to the face and having her face smashed.

"Alright, do that again. I will dodge this time."

Plenty of confidence.
It feels like she'll dodge it.
This world's sword art can even reflect magic.
Not sure about North God Style, but since she's a Demon Lord, I think she can avoid magic of my level.
Open my demon eye for now, but would a second of foresight really make a difference?
What now?
... First, find a opening.
But if we do, then what?

Would my magic even do anything?
My strongest Stone Cannon couldn't kill a defenseless Badigadi.
Much less when Atofe is poised.

As long as she guards it, no matter what kind of magic...

"Rudeus. If it's just Cliff, then he can make it to the magic teleportation circle and escape."

I look over to Cliff after Elinalise said that.

Cliff, his eyes focused at Atofe.

But his legs are shaking.

And no battle ability.

"Tea, plant, and notebook. Take all three with him, and Nanahoshi will be saved."

"Right."

Right.

Yeah, this is why we came in the first place.

Save Nanahoshi, that was the goal.

If we have a goal, then accomplishing it is the most important.

If we lose here, we won't die. But we won't see family for 10 years, which sucks.

"And find reinforcements. Perugia and Atofe have a history. He can definitely get help."

Perugius and his 12 Familiars.

True, if it's him, maybe he'll come to our aid.

No matter what, he's the hero that sealed Laplace.

If he can do that, he should be able to take on Atofe.

"Fine. Then, let's do that... Can you convince Cliff?"

"Watch me."

Elinalise retreats next to Cliff.

Zanoba, Elinalise, and I will create an opening.

Cliff will break out, run into the magic teleportation circle.

Cliff convince Perugius. We'll try to hold out.

Will it work?

Can we handle it?

Also, can Cliff convince Pergius?

While Cliff tries to convince Pergius, would we lose and be forced into contract?

No matter what, if Cliff escapes, then Nanahoshi is saved.

Save Nanahoshi.

That was the goal.

But, I want to return too.

Eh, damn, I am going in circles.

Calm down.

First, we need to restrain Atofe.

At that moment, use magic to disperse the black clad soldiers and let Cliff escape.

Then, if the situation allows, we will also take a chance and dive for the magic circle.

Okay.

Let's do that.

Atofe cannot be defeated, but the surrounding black clad soldiers can.

Take it seriously this time.

Destroy them all.

Okay.

I can do this.

Do it, do it.

Kill.

Kill them all, and I get to go home. Okay.

Yes, I can do this.

I'm not just saying it this time.

"Don't worry, Shisho. Demon Lord Atofe, I would stop her even if it cost me my life."

Not an ounce of hesitation from Zanoba.

Calm.

Reliable.

Why is he so manly in a situation like this?

Like a line out of the movies.

If I'm a girl, it wouldn't be weird if I fall for him.

[But can I really get away? I don't run very fast, and the luggage too...]

[If they give chase, Rudeus and I will stop them. Don't look back, don't think, just keep running. And don't trip.]

[I should fight as well...]

[We won't win even with the four of us. You leaving for reinforcements is also a serious battle.]

[In that case... Oh, I get it...]

Cliff's voice passes by my ears.

From here, to the magic circle entrance, takes about thirty steps or so.

Not close nor far.

But he has to run the whole distance.

"Persuasion successful."

Soon Elinalise returns to the front.

Looking at Cliff.

A serious look on his face.

A man with a purpose.

Not one running from a fight.

Running for help is a battle...

Elinalise sure has a way with words, how envious.

"Zanoba and I will create an opening with Atofe. Rudeus, take care of the black clad soldiers around you."

"Got it."

Strategy session over.

We turn towards Atofe.

Poised with her sword, sneering at us.

"Your goal is to beat me?"

No enemy behind her.

30 paces. Uphill, no good footholds.

Won't Cliff fall on the way?

No, do it anyways.

"Zanoba, Elinalise-san, I'll take the first shot."

"Understood."

Facing Atofe, I raise my magic staff.

Using my usual stone cannon.

By firepower alone, the King Class [Lightning] might be better, but at this distance we'll be hit as well.

Annihilated by my own magic, I'll pass.

"Phew..."

Deep breath, focus magic into the staff.

Atofe stands still.

Even if she knew I know voiceless incantation, we will proceed as planned.

Convenient, but...

<Atofe deflects the Stone Cannon with her sword.>

Demon eye clearly sees that Atofe moved to doubt my attack.

Damn. Even though I was told that my stone cannon is very high level, but it seems useless against Atofe.

Then, would lightning work?

Use the magic that she's most vigilant against...?

"Shisho. I'll definitely follow through, count on me."

"... Zanoba."

I can trust his words.

... I also prepare myself.

"Okay, go!"

I fired off the strongest possible Stone Cannon.

With a Kaboom it flies toward Atofe.

"Just give up!"

Atofe moves like a mirage.

Just a tiny bit she moves her wrist, barely shifting the sword.

And in that moment, sword and cannon collide, frightening sparks come flying out.

The stone cannon shifts course and slams into a boulder at some far off distance, kicking off a great cloud of dust.

Still no good.

"Arrrrgh!!"

In the next instance, Zanoba threw something at Atofe.

"Ehh?"

Screaming as it flew towards Atofe.

Atofe smiling at she prepares to parry the attack.

"Just give... Eh?"

Just when Atofe was about to cut it in two, she stops her motion.

Then, what's tossed hit Atofe on the face.

"Wah?"

"Ah?"

Like glue it sticks on Atofe's face...

It's Kishirika that was sitting on Zanoba's shoulder.

"Ew! It smells! Go take a shower you idiot!"

"This one wants to too.... Eek?"

Atofe grabs hold of Kishirika and tosses her somewhere far away.

Kishirika flew out of the circle surrounding us and lands with a dud.

"Come on, throwing something like that over here.. Eh?"

Atofe screams in shock.

Zanoba with his fists clenched rushed up to Atofe.

Elinalise follows behind like a shadow.

Crap, I should stop watching.

"Come to me, fighting spirit!"

"Ahhh!"

Zanoba throws a punch.

With horrifying strength it flies towards Atofe.

With her gauntlet she easily...

"Ugh?"

She didn't dodge.

A terrifying noise, bam, he steps into Atofe.

The gauntlet smashed into an awful shape.

Zanoba follows through with another step.

A big step forward, another punch at Atofe.

"Good!"

Atofe lifts up her great sword from an awkward position.

Another terrible noise, crunch, Atofe's leg twisted.

But her momentum remains, and her swing towards Zanoba.

"Grr."

Zanoba kneels in pain.

The first time I have ever seen Zanoba like this.

Zanoba doesn't even flinch when I hit him with Stone Cannon.

With a single blow...

Atofe looks over arrogantly, but a little short of breath.

"That body is not bad, but... remember. There's no perfect defense. This is what my husband Karum..."

"Hah!"

"Mm?"

While she was talking.

Using Zanoba's back as her springboard, Elinalise leaps over.

Using her momentum she aims for Atofe's throat, aiming for the exposed flesh.

But the attack and cut sound are both deflected.

Not the sound of skin.

The defense of touki.

"There's more!"

Elinalise's sword hand holds firm.
With her shield raised, she makes a sidestep and thrusts.
Invisible shock wave flies from the sword and lands on Atofe.
But Atofe looks undisturbed.
She wrinkles her brows unhappily, like sand got into her eyes.

"Your strike is weak! Fine, here, take this!"

Atofe raises up her great sword and slashes.
Elinalise steps back to avoid that swing.

"Psh!"

Hurriedly she raises her shield.
GONG. Elinalise spins around.
Elinalise rolls on the rocky ground, then pounced like a cat.
My eye sees, terror.

"But good footwork. With training at my place..."
"Aaah!"

Zanoba suddenly gets up while Atofe was talking.
More like a leap, with his hands stretched, he dives at Atofe.

"Ahh!"

Just like that, he grabs Atofe with a bear hug.
Both her hands restrained, he lifts her off the ground.

"Argh. How dare you hug me so shamelessly... Guards!"

Like a vise Zanoba holds on with all his strength. Atofe spits out black blood.
The combo worked?
No, the opponent is an Immortal Demon Lord, temporary damage won't work.

"Shisho! Now!"
"...!"

Zanoba's words confirm the situation.

Atofe is immobilized.

A chance.

"Cliff, now, go!"

With all my power injected into my staff.

An area of effect spell.

Enough to kill all the black clad soldiers at once.

"Got it!"

Cliff begins to run, the black clad soldiers surrounding us raise their swords in shock.

No, too late.

"Frost Nova!"

Cold air surges from my staff.

The ground cracks, frozen, masses of cold air reach the black clad soldiers that circle us.

"Nah!"

"Mm?"

The black clad soldiers panic as the ground below their feet begins to freeze.

I did it...!

It might be a sneak attack.

But this way, it can't be avoided.

While I was thinking.

A voice rang.

"Bursting flames cover my body, [Burning Place]!"

One man, like on fire hot air spreads from him.

Like he's challenging my Frost Nova.

The man, and the two soldiers next to him, manages to defrost.

That man is Moore.

The old soldier begins to recite as soon as I raised my staff, taking advantage of the time gap.

Even so, no matter how powerful, no matter how fast,
Even if it's me, I will show no mercy...

But Moore's magic only managed to defrost himself and the two besides him.
Everyone else is completely engulfed in ice like sculptures.
By pure power, I have won.

Also, I, have finally killed...

"Even freezing our black armors... what incredible power! Everyone, recite Burning place!"

"Yes! Spirit of fire, everywhere between the sky and earth..."

Moore shouted to his surroundings, and the black clads in the ice begins to sing.

Not dead.

No one died.

That black armor.

That black armor can resist water magic?

Curses.

I used the wrong spell?

"Mm."

Cliff squeezes pass Atofe's side.

"Moore, do not let him escape!"

"Ha!"

On Atofe's command Moore begins to move.

A moment later, the soldiers unfrozen by Moore's magic start running as well.

Elinalise dashes over, sliding in front of them.

And with her sword raised, stops them.

"Rudeus! Go!"

Moore chases Cliff without looking back.

Cliff lugging a large baggage and sapling.
Although Moore is wearing armor, he's fast.
He's only 7 steps from Cliff.
I point my staff towards Moore.

"Stone Cannon!"

<Moore recites [Earth Wall] to counter Stone Cannon.>

It's fine. I can make it.
I pour magic into my staff and fire.

"The earth... Grr!"

Moore runs with a hand raised while chanting.
But like a laser the Stone Cannon strikes his arm, sending his armor flying.
With one hand left Moore stumbles... but did not stop.

"Spirit of Water, become my strength - 'Icicle Field'."

Moore's magic surrounds him in mist.
Using fog to evade my attack?
Still, his incantation is short.
Almost like Roxy, chanting omission?

"Wind Blast!"

I form wind with my staff and clears the fog.
And maybe to blow him away too, but, without regard to pain he approaches Cliff.

That black armor, does it resist wind magic as well?
No, not just wind and water, but resists the others too.
What do I do?
He's only 6 steps away.
I miss the kill shot, and if he dodges, it'll hit Cliff--
Just now, my Demon Eye sees.

<Moore begins to chant as he runs.>

"Spirit of Earth all across the land! I call upon you, answer-"
"Disrupt Magic!"

Instantly released, the magic I have practiced at home.
The spell I trained with Sylphy.
Moments before Moore's magic is complete, it disappears.

"Seriously? Even Disrupt Magic?"

Moore looks at his hand in shock.
But his legs have not stopped.
Only 5 steps away.

I follow, like using my hand to block his way, and fires.
Of course, I should use what I'm used to.
My well worn tactics should work no matter how experienced the opponent.
Just like in practice.

"Quagmire!"

Between Moore and Cliff, a giant quagmire formed.
Moore steps one foot onto that sticky quagmire..

"Mm... The unknown God! Answer my prayer, bring heaven on earth! [Earth Lance]!"

Instantly, Moore releases magic under his feet.
From his feet, a great spear of earth appears.
Running on this spear, Moore quickly passed the Quagmire.
His legs have not stopped.
Only 4 steps away.

Countered.
I was stopped.
How unexpected.

"Rudeus, Cliff! Hurry!"
"I know!"

Elinalise screams out.

Glancing over, she's currently busy with the two soldiers.

Two versus one.

The black clad soldiers do not press the attack, merely to keep her busy.

"Hey, I said, you shameless person! Let me go! At least fight with your hands!"

"I won't even if I die!"

Zanoba headbutts Atofe. Trying his best even with blood flowing down his head.

I need to hurry too.

The other black clad soldiers are also unfreezing.

Steam rises all around, coloring the air white.

"Grr."

What do I do?

What do I do to stop Moore?

He is strong. In a magic fight he's far more experienced than I.

He parries basic magic like nothing.

Would stronger magic work?

No. If it's too strong, then even Cliff will get dragged into it. Then there's Moore's counters and the armor's resistance.

"...!"

Just then, I noticed my feet are wet.

The result of Frost Nova.

Due to defrosting from Burning Place, the entire area area is shocked in water.

The first to defrost, Moore too is soaking wet.

Of course, Elinalise and I, our feet are also covered in a water puddle.

This magic, Atofe only saw once before.

In other words, Moore has never encountered it.

But if I use it now.

I, Elinalise, even Zanoba will get hit.

Only Cliff would be spared.

Cliff is out of range.

He won't be hit.

In that instant, I had resolve.

"Electric!"



Not enough to kill, electricity comes flying out.

A purple lightning flies towards Moore.

BANG it rings loudly, a terrifying show of force.

Purple lightning indiscriminately licks the surrounding ground.

With the ground soaking wet, it easily spread out to all the water soaked people and electrifies them.

"Kyaaa!"

"Gaaa!"

"Ohhh!"

All the black clad soldiers collapse in a heap of smoke.

Elinalise as well; Zanoba as well; Atofe as well.

All the unfrozen people.

And Moore as well.

Me too.

"Ugh!"

My body too received a horrible shock.

A pain down my spine, all my joints feel like they're bent in the wrong direction.

It wasn't enough to kill.

So I know I won't die.

But my eyes went dark, and my consciousness went with it.

By the time I came to I was already on the floor.

Unconscious for no more than two seconds.

My is body paralyzed.

But I can see.

How is it?

Cliff.

Raising my head, I see Moore kneeling with one foot on the ground.

Smoking rising from between his armor, yet he still points his remaining fingers towards Cliff.

Mumble mumble... incantation?
Magic Disrupt.
No, it won't make it in time.
I pour magic into my left hand.
Even if my body is paralyzed, I can still move my prosthetic hand.
With my palm towards Moore.

"[Wind Bind]!"
"[Hand, absorb]!"

Moore releases a whip of wind, but it instantly disappears.

"What?"

Moore looks this way.
His face hidden in the helmet, but he must be stunned.
Serves you right.

Without regard Cliff runs forward.
Only 3 steps away from the magic teleportation circle entrance.

No one can catch him now.
No one.
Even Atofe is still paralyzed.
But her eyes wide open, she stares me down like a tiger.

"You've done it. That's an incredible magic."
"..."

"Interesting. Taking you as my subordinate is indeed... Hahaha, a magician of your caliber, I shall cherish you, hahaha."

Unable to look away, I could only accept Atofe's hideous smile.

Well, it's over.
The immortals recover quickly, far faster than I.
It's too late to run.
Even resisting will be impossible.

Zanoba passed out.

Still clinging on, he slumps to the ground.
He seems to be vulnerable against electricity.
He probably lost consciousness because of the electric strike.

Elinalise, while still feeling wobbly, tries to make a stand.
She's in as bad of a shape as I am, but still wants to try.
Elinalise refuses to give up.
[Never give up.]
A white haired coach once said.

I will too.
I can do this.
Do your best.
Let's go home.
I want to go home.

Go home, go home and... if possible, sexy time with Sylphy.
And Roxy too.
And hug Lucy.
Not just sword practice with Norn, but magic too.
The rice Aisha has raised, I was looking toward to it.
If Zenith's memory returns, then, let's take everyone to visit dad's grave.
Then, just like before, a happy life.
A fun filled day, everyday in this other world.
Right, just like that.
Just like that.

... Alright, I can do this.
I can get up.
If my hand can move, I can use magic.
Staff, where's my staff.
I can't do without it.

Ah, good.
I was crushing it under me.
I'm sorry, Aqua Heartia, was I heavy?

Okay, I can do this. Hang in there until rescue arrives.
Just until then.

I don't need to win.
Cliff-senpai, get help.
Perugius, he's annoying, but I'm counting on you.
Please convince him.
Even if he refuses right away, at least this year, please!

"Eh?"

Elinalise makes a noise, her head raised.
Her eyes point forward.
Cliff.
Right at the prison entrance.
And from there appears a black clad soldier, face to face...

Black clad soldiers, from inside the entrance, came out...

"Seriously?"

... There's more inside.

"Ahh..."

Why didn't we realize it.
There's a hole in the ground, even Atofe would want to check it out.

"Damn it..."

A darkness grows in my heart.
Wanting to cry out, feeling powerless, an all too familiar feeling.
Despair.

Never again will I meet Sylphy; never again will I meet Roxy.
Instead I will train under that idiot Demon Lord for the rest of my life.
My strength left me.
The pain in my heart has robbed me of my strength.

At that moment.
A voice of shock can be heard.

"How...?"

That voice isn't mine.

Isn't Elinalise.

Isn't Zanoba.

And of course isn't Moore.

It's Atofe.

Looking at Cliff, she said.

"Ah! Atofe-sama..."

The black clad soldier pushes Cliff aside, staggering down the slope.

Somehow, he looks off.

"Over there, in front of the magic circle, Pur..."

In the next moment.

The black clad soldier was split in two.

Right down the middle, in exact halves.

Then, behind that cut body.

The outlines of a person.

Glowing white hair.

Golden Sanpaku eyes.

White cloth splattered with blood.

"Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe."

Speaking in fluent Demon God language, he walks out.

"You might not think it's important... but Rikarisu might disappear in a magic teleportation circle, that possibility exists, so please think for a moment."

Behind him, one by one others appear.

Arumanfi of the Bright, Sylvaril of the Void.

And others I don't recognize.

Six in total.

"Your soldiers' blood has dirtied my castle."

I see.

Atofe arrived here before us.

She already found the entry way to the magic teleportation circle.

She ordered soldiers to investigate.

When they found the magic teleportation circle, they obviously went in.

Thus, he appears.

The Sky Castle was invaded by the Magic Race.

"Perugius---!"

Atofe shouts.

Perugius Dola.

The Armored Dragon King is here.

Part 3

Her mood changed the moment Atofe saw Perugius.
Up until now, it has been the pleasures of battle.
But now it's unbelievable killing intent.
Like seeing her father's killer, she stares and grimaces at Perugius.

"Perugius, you---!"

Atofe squirms her still numb body to shake Zanoba off.
Zanoba, out of strength, falls to one side.
Atofe rushes at Perugius, her back feathers shaking.
With a heavy push she intended to jump, but instead her knees gave out.

"Hahaha!"

Perugius laughs joyfully at this sight.

"Oh, how entertaining, Atoferatofe. Getting careless again? Does being careless run in the family for the Immortal clan?"

"So you are the one who sent them! You played dirty just to kill me... What happened to your promise with Karuman?"

Perugius sneers at Atofe with a smile.
The only thing Atofe can do in her anger is yell.
Moore tries to stagger near Atofe, but it was impossible.
Right now, only Cliff, Perugius, and his entourage can still move.

Perugius stares at Atofe, like a tiger finding the perfect prey.

"Don't be mistaken. I just came to save a few friends."

"Liar! Ughh!"

"I'll keep my promise with Karuman. He was a dear friend."

"I hate you even if you're Karuman's friend!"

"... I hate unreasonable idiots like you."

As he talks, Perugius raise his hands, holding something in each.
Atofe's face turns pale.

"You, you, no way..."

Ignoring Atofe, Perugia opens his mouth.

"That dragon lives solely while following the path of chivalry. The nails on his hands are long and sharp, for he never raises a fist."

That opener sounds familiar.

"The second dragon clenches his fist in anger. His nails broken, his teeth fell, but the feeling has been conveyed. He held chivalry in his hand, yet did he abandon chivalry?"

One by one the words come out.

And with each word, the surrounding magic gathers around Perugia.

"The third dragon that died. He who possessed the most ephemeral eyes Dragon General of Lustrous Green Scales. By the name of Armored Dragon King Perugia, I summon --"

Look carefully, two doors appear besides Atofe, sandwiching her.

Beautifully carved dragons mark those doors.

An ornate silver door.

An ornate golden door.

Slowly but surely, as if sprouting from the ground, the doors appear.

"Open [Back Dragon Door]."

"Summon [Front Dragon Door]."

Under Perugia's quiet command, the doors open.

Wind blew.

From the right door to the left.

But, it's not wind.

A flow of something, doing something.

Ah, I know.

This summoning magic is magic absorption.

I can feel magic peeling from my body.

But it's different from with Orsted.

It's even faster than back then, like both my magic and my strength are being sucked dry.

"Ah, Atofe-sama, get away..."

Moore slowly crawls over suddenly.

Atofe, her legs quivering, can only stare at Perugius in anger.

"Perugius--!"

Her body seems to have shrunk slightly.

Maybe the doors have been leeching her touki.

"You know this will break the promise!"

"So what? This is a once in a life time opportunity. I won't miss it."

Perugius holds up his right hand.

His hand covered in white.

Soon his right hand begins to shine, a dazzling light blinds the area.

"Armored Dragon Hand Sword [Break]."

Perugius swings down his hand.

Light leaves his hand, flying straight at Atofe.

"I'll remember this, Perugius--!"

Atofe looks stiff drunk.

Then, a moment later, flew off at a distance.

Her body cut in two, and soon disappears from my sight.

"Pssh, not like she'll die."

Perugius complains quietly, turns back like he lost interest.

"Sylvaril. Take these four, heal them."

"And the others?"

"Leave them."

"Great Demon Empress Kishirika spotted."

Just as Sylvaril said, I spy Kishirika at a distance.
She got hit as well.
Sorry.

"Leave her."

"Hah?"

Apparently he's letting Kishirika off too.
Thank goodness.

"Phew."

With Sylvaril approaching, I can finally take a breath.

... We are saved.

Part 4

Afterwards.

Perugius's subordinates carried us back.

Outside of Cliff, everyone else needed a shoulder to cling on.

Cliff and Kishirika were discussing something in the meantime.

By the time I checked, Kishirika had already disappeared somewhere after her usual laugh.

Let's meet again at somewhere easier next time... okay?

After moving everyone back, Sylvaril stopped the magic teleportation circle.

The path to the Magic Continent is closed.

Greeting Roxy's parents will have to wait for another time.

Damaged by electric shock, we were sent to the infirmary.

Cliff was on call.

It was he that offered.

While saying [This type of burn, shouldn't be too bad...] he brilliantly cleared our wounds with healing magic.

It won't kill us, but the burns were quite far in and relatively severe.

Leaving it alone might even lead to complications.

But if I didn't go that far, it might not have crippled the Immortal Demon Lord.

Cliff was particularly careful with Elinalise's wounds.

Leaving a scar would be terrible.

Love struck from that kind of Cliff, once done, Elinalise and him disappeared together.

Zanoba is still unconscious.

This time he saved us.

No amount of thanks would do.

Friendship may be priceless, but I can't cheap out with gifts.

I need to properly thank him after he's up.

After the treatments are done and I can start moving, I head over to Sylphy.

Sylphy is reading on her bed. She looks worried when she saw me come in.

"What's wrong?" I didn't answer her question, only quietly climb on the bed and hug her.

Sylphy whines a little.

Like whine in refusal, full of grief.^[18] I hug Sylphy tightly.

I thought the only thing that's important is that she is here.

Atofe's laughter still haunts me.

Although the numbness has left me, that despair in my heart still lingers.

If I had died in battle, it would all be for naught.

Atofe showed mercy, and the black guards did not attack.

Moore used magic, but nothing lethal.

But, how terrifying.

If Perugius didn't come.

And Atofe captured and forced me into contract.

Then hugging Sylphy like this might be impossible.

Even after Lucy grows up, I might not see her.

Roxy too, Norn, Aisha, everyone, they would already...

This, only this scares me.

It makes me tremble from fear.

Suddenly, she rubs my head.

Sylphy runs her hand down my hair like a comb.

Her fingers, delicate, warm, and soft.

With a smile, Sylphy returns my hug.

Nothing needs to be said.

She, only her hug.

Only that is enough.

In Sylphy's embrace, I fell asleep at ease.

CHAPTER 9

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE FLOATING CITADEL

Part 1

Two days have passed.

Zanoba woke up and has been cheerfully checking out the art pieces around the castle.

Doesn't look like the electric shock left any complications.

Thank goodness. If he stayed unconscious with his life hanging by a thread like that, I don't know how I would face Ginger.

There have been some changes for Cliff.

After the event, Cliff and Kishirika talked about something.

I don't know what they talked about, but he was rewarded.

Kishirika's reward.

In other word, a Demon Eye.

The Demon Eye Cliff received is the Identification Eye.

Up to the extent of Kishirika's knowledge, he knows everything he sets his eyes on.

From now on, even if a similar situation was to happen, he can handle it on his own.

Cliff is taking it like a man.

That man currently, unable to control his Demon Eye, is struggling along.

Everything in the world with name and explanations attached.

A world covered in words.

Even now he cannot walk about without Elinalise guiding him.

But he'll learn to control it eventually, after all, Cliff is a genius.

Until then, he should wear an eye patch.

Part 2

Also, Nanahoshi's illness.

We brought back the tea.

A little after drinking the brew, Nanahoshi begins to feel the urges.

Then Nanahoshi with Yuruzu's help headed to the infirmary... To protect her honor, I'll omit the rest. In short, relieved.

"How's the body holding up?"

Nanahoshi is still bedridden.

Her complexion has improved but still weary. She looks obviously frail.

She probably still needs at least a month of rest.

"Much better now."

Looks like she's in a good mood.

Not stressing over work like usual, but looking rather drowsy like she just woke up.

Also, bed head.

She may live an unhealthy lifestyle, but she actually combs her hair everyday.

"This time, thanks."

With Sokasu tea warm in her hand, she bows at me.

How rare of her to be polite.

"Going through such danger for my medication. You... saved me."



Hearing her so polite makes me feel rather uncomfortable.
No, she's probably feeling fragile after her body weakened so much.

"Don't worry about it."

"You have always been looking out for me... Even after I said those awful things to you... You helped me without a complaint. I don't know how I can ever repay you."

Nanahoshi looks so apologetic.

Nanahoshi as a goodie two shoes, that's a first.

Did Yuruzu of Atonement's power manage to change her personality as well?

"Now that I think about it. Rudeus-san is my senior, yet I have been so impolite..."

"Over there doesn't matter. Here I'm only 18."

"How old were you originally?"

"Thirty... No, forget it. The age difference isn't important. Please drop the honorifics. Just like before."

"Okay."

Nanahoshi takes a sip of Sokasu tea, drinking slowly.

Looks like drinking works too.

"From what I heard, your sickness..."

"Can't be cured, probably."

Nanahoshi's Drain Syndrome has no cure.

Sokasu tea can temporarily eliminate magic from within, but if she leaves it alone, the magic will re-accumulate.

Because she's not of this world, there's no permanent fix.

But as long as she drinks Sokasu tea regularly, she should be fine, probably.

Even a little magic can create complications.

Who knows how long before she contracts another strange illness.

And next time, if it's a disease from time immemorial, then even Kishirika might not know of it.

To live in this world, you have to contact magic.

In the air, in your food, magic is everywhere.

"Nanahoshi. You must go back. You can't die in this world."

"... Yes."

"I will do everything I can to help, until you find a way."

"But I..."

"Don't worry about the reward. If you ever get in trouble, please come discuss it with me, no matter what."

"..."

Hearing that, Nanahoshi sniffs and start crying.

Under her quiet sobs, a [Thank you] can be heard.

Patiently, I wait for Nanahoshi to finish.

After a while, with a stuffy nose and swollen eyes, Nanahoshi said.

"But, if I go back."

"Yes, as soon as possible..."

"No, I won't be able to repay you once I get back..."

Ah, so she wants to repay me before then.

She's surprisingly earnest.

"Don't fuss over the details. Besides, it's not like I never got anything from you."

"What I mean is, a reward for helping my research."

"Then how about this, would you mind if I consult you sometimes with minor issues?"

"Minor issues like?"

"Like what do girls your age want? I live a married life with Sylphy, got married, our child was born, but I don't really know how a girl her age thinks. If it's you, since you're around the same age, maybe you can?"

"... How Sylphy thinks?"

Nanahoshi puts a hand on her chin, concentrating over a spot on her blanket.

Thinking seriously.

Dutifully.

"Don't worry about it today. Just that if some day, when we have a fight, please take responsibility."

"... Got it."

Nanahoshi nods earnestly.

Similar in age, but ultimately she's a person from another world, and she probably won't know anything about married life.

Of course, I also don't know what people my age think.

"Well then, that settles it. You're still frail, so take care of yourself."

"Okay. Thanks."

I exit the room.

If we stay too long together, Sylphy will get jealous again.

A jealous Sylphy is cute too.

But I don't want to make a hobby out of keeping her uneasy.

I wish Sylphy can accept my love without worries.

But just thinking isn't good enough.

Part 3

Walking down a hallway, a beautiful sunset can be seen outside the window.
And under the window, an expansive courtyard.
No matter which world, sunset is always dazzling.
I don't like high places.
But looking from this beautiful courtyard, witnessing the sun setting amidst a sea of clouds.
I too want to lose myself in such scenery.
With that in mind, I head out.
Flowers I have never seen before line this manicured garden.
A fantasy landscape lit by the setting sun, shy behind the clouds.
If I whisper sweet nothings to Sylphy in such a scene, how will she react?
Will she lower her reddened cheeks and grip my hands tightly?
She would be too cute to bear.
Okay, I shall collect Sylphy and test this hypothesis.
And with Roxy too...
If it's her, she probably would say nonchalantly [You don't have to say that] or something.
Well, we don't have anything scheduled for tonight. That's the only time when she acts brazenly.
But it's fine. Not just sexy time, I also want to try normal couple stuff once a while.
Watching the setting sun together, [It's beautiful!] [No, you're more beautiful!] and watch Roxy blush.
Sigh, she's not here. She won't see this.

"Oh?"

Walking around while thinking about this and that, I spot near the edge of the courtyard.
A white table.
Three seated around it talking about something.

"That was Shisho's magic. Purple magic flies out of Shisho's right hand. Atofe was burned to a crisp, completely paralyzed."
"Oh, Atofe was so weakened because of his magic."
"The depth of Rudeus-sama's magic is truly astounding."

The three chatting around the table.

Zanoba, Ariel.

Also Perugius.

They're happily chatting away in the sunset.

Not participating in the discussion are two more individuals.

Luke behind Ariel, and Sylvaril behind Perugius.

Including the two standing, all five involved in Zanoba's conversation.

"Even Elinalise and I were taken out. Outside of Shisho, I don't think anyone else in the world can handle magic like that."

"That sounds like [Lightning]... But that kind of power is necessary if you want to stop Atofe."

"And then? How did the battle go?"

"Well, about that, at that moment I lost consciousness.. oh, speaking of the devil."

Zanoba turns to look at me.

It can't be helped if they spot me already.

I take a bow and walk over.

"I'm sorry to intrude. Everyone enjoying a tea party here?"

"That's right. Shisho! Perugius-sama wants to hear about the battle with Atofe, so I have been telling what happened."

"I see."

Looking at Perugius.

He looks much happier than during our audience.

"So I heard, Rudeus. That it's your magic that weakened Atofe to that degree."

"No, it was all thanks to Zanoba for keeping her still. If he didn't, then she might have dodged and avoided most of the damage."

"I see... Ha, I just recall the way she looked back then."

Perugius shows a crooked, loathsome smile.

Atofe is really hated.

Anyways, he seems to be in a good mood.

"You seem to be in a good mood."

"Of course. She had poured cold water on my plans more than once. I never thought I would have a chance at revenge like that."

"Revenge?"

"Indeed, a very old grudge."

What he refers to happened 400 years ago.

400 years ago, Perugius as a young adventurer supported the human side of the war.
On the front line of battle.

Atofe was commanding the front line on the Demon side.

Several times, Perugius met in battle with Atofe.

Still low in combat power back then, he never had a chance of besting Atofe, almost got himself killed a few times.

And every time, it was Dragon God Urupan and North God Karuman that came to his rescue. A memory that makes one grimace.

Afterwards Perugius swore revenge no matter what.

But North God Karuman ended up marrying Immortal Demon Lord Atofe.

At his death bed, the North God prohibited Perugius and Atofe from killing each other.

Also, an opportunity to visit the Magic Continent never presented itself.

He was forced to give up, but unexpectedly an opportunity for a beat down landed in his lap.

That makes him happy.

"You deserve my thanks. Well done."

"Didn't that break your promise with North God Karuman?"

"Karuman prohibited us from killing each other, but that was a one-sided beat down. So it should be fine, probably."

Beating down a defenseless opponent, what a brute.

But he has his reasons.

"I have misjudged you. What I mean is, you deserve a reward."

"Reward... is unnecessary."

Right now, I don't need any reward.

This is fine.

I don't desire strength.

"Indeed. Once Nanahoshi recovers, how about I personally tutor you in summoning magic?"

"... And I won't be home for 10 years?"

"I'm different from Atofe."

If I can go home, then I have no reason to refuse.

Especially since I am curious about summoning and teleportation magic myself.

Something like this might happen again.

Also, some combat skill will be nice too.

I am not good with fights, but living in this world, it's better if I learn a few tricks for surviving the next crisis.

I'm probably strong enough to protect my family, but after the Atofe fight, I can't help but feel a little inadequate.

Yeah, I never imagined a fight of that caliber...

I don't want to wait until it's too late.

"Then, Perugia-sama. After the summoning lessons, how about some combat lessons and practice as well?"

"Ha, inspired by the Atofe fight? Or has the match against Atofe whet your appetite?"

Ah, he seems annoyed.

No good, no good.

"No, I mean a few tricks for if I get into a sticky situation again."

"... Well then, I shall grant you a magic tool to get in touch with me. Sylvaril!"

Perugius said as he winks at Sylvaril.

Sylvaril pulls out a flute in the shape of a tower with a dragon coiled on it.

"Use it at a location associated with me. When Clearnight of Thunder ^[19] hears you, Arumanfi will come get you."

I accept the flute and put it away.

Given how the conversation went, I assume if I was ever in trouble, with this flute he'll come to my aid.

That works too.

"The sun has set."

Without realizing it, the sun set and night falls.

But it isn't dark.

Both the table and the surrounding flowers glow pale white.

"This table is made from magic light stone. Sit down, let's chat for a little more."

Being told that, I sat down as well.

Part 4

"Dwarf craftsmanship really did reach its peak before the second Human-Demon Great War."

"Yeah. If dwarf homelands weren't destroyed in that war, then we might have witnessed more wonderful things."

Perugius is a fun person to talk with.

Well informed and a lover of arts.

And as a man of culture, he also appreciates creativity.

"But the Dwarf Race did not die out. That race has delicate hands, sooner or later a genius craftsman will reappear and make wonderful things once more."

"Say, aren't you training as a craftsman yourself?"

"Indeed. Shisho has profound knowledge in doll making. If he were to transmit that knowledge, then doll making may one day reach new heights."

"I have seen the figures Rudeus has made. They are very interesting. To clearly present the essence of man in such matters is truly stunning."

Those two are enjoying themselves.

With my inferior knowledge, I couldn't keep up.

But they're fun to follow.

"It's not that great."

"Don't be modest."

"No, Sylphy has told me of Rudeus-sama's talents."

This tea party.

Actually, we already had another participant.

She been trying to join the happy conversation with [Ah, speaking of which--] or [About the dwarfs--] but never got a word in.

Like a lonesome girl.

I as well. The topics are too specific for me to join.

"Not just great with magic, but Rudeus-sama is also a good man."

"Thank you very much, Ariel-sama."

Ariel Anemoi Asura.

Hearing such pandering from her, I can only smile wryly.
When it comes to dolls, she can only offer flattery and repeat what's said.
She wants to secure Perugius's cooperation, but does not know how to gain his favor.
Nothing will come from this.
Well, I'll be leaving soon.

"Speaking of which, Perugius-sama, we are considering putting this figure on the market. Mind giving us your expert's opinion?"

Zanoba suddenly brought up that topic.
Takes out a box from under his feet.
A familiar box.

"Oh..."

Perugius looks at the box with excitement.
But as soon as Zanoba opens it, his smile turns into a frown.

"A Supard figure?"
"As expected of Perugius-sama, you figured it out right away."
"..."

Inside the box is the Ruijerd figure that Julie made.
A very dynamic poise.
But, Perugius is not pleased.

"You know that I hate the Magic Race, yet you still want my opinion?"
"Ah! No, I don't mean, it's..."

Perugius sneers at the Ruijerd figure and spits out.

"Sale of this figure is... forbidden."

So it's no go.
Perugius truly hates the Magic Race.
He might be forgiving to an extent, but towards them, his prejudice runs deep.
Zanoba should have known.
What was he expecting?

"No, Perugia-sama. You too, to the model of this figure, owe him a great favor."

"A favor?"

Perugius frowns, then his eyes suddenly widen.

"Wait, this figure, is Ruijerd Supardia?"

"Indeed. Perugia-sama has said before, that during your final battle with Laplace... the one who had helped Perugia-sama, this is indeed Ruijerd."

Zanoba explains in detail.

Without me realizing it, Zanoba had planned out this entire conversation.

Then, he said it.

Well done!

"Of course I understand that Perugia-sama hates the Magic Race. But if Shisho's techniques spread across the land, then it will send the art world into a whirlwind. Wouldn't you want to see? A world full of art and dolls?"

"Oh."

Perugius looks troubled.

Just a little more, maybe I should help out?

"The Supard Race may be hated, but without Ruijerd's help, I might not be alive right now."

"Perugius-sama. Ruijerd regrets what he has done."

"Regret?"

Perugius looks bothered by my words.

What should I say?

"Yes. He was fooled by Laplace."

"Laplace, huh..."

Perugius's face looks distorted.

Is this right?

"It's true. Laplace gave him a malevolent spear and manipulated him. It ruined his race's honor, and even caused him to kill his own family... For that he felt ashamed and hatred for Laplace."

"..."

"He has been traveling the world to atone for his race's honor. This plan is also hatched to help him. I owe Ruijerd a great debt... If Perugius-sama also owes Ruijerd, then as repayment, will you permit this?"

After listening to me, Perugius crosses his arms, closes his eyes, and his brows wrinkle.

After some time, he mutters a single sentence.

"Supard Race's honor and such, I'm unsure but... a debt must be repaid..."

"Oh, really?"

".... Do as you like."

Perugius still has his objections, that is obvious.

But with this, Arumanfi won't come trashing the place when we put Ruijerd figures on sale.

Rather, if anyone complains, we can claim Perugius's approval.

Perugius is known in all the lands. His name holds weight.

Really, most impressive, Zanoba.

He knew exactly where to lead the conversation.

Zanoba is really shining recently.

Far more than for me to imitate.

"Thank you for your consideration!"

Zanoba bows his head.

With that, our marketing plan takes a big step forward.

Still, Ruijerd, where are you?

"Say, Shisho. Why not show off a little to Perugius-sama?"

"Of how my figures are made?"

"Yes, Shisho's specialty, the method of creating a figure from nothing."

Perugius looks this way and nods.

"See. He's interested in your magic."

Alright, figure making demonstration.

Just what I do regularly.

Use earth magic to form the general shape, then slowly trim the details.

This time I'll make it about "Roid" ^[20] size.

This way, I can relax, and it'll turn out well.

The quality won't be great, so just a spare.

On the face, I'll try to make a bird mask.

A Sylvaril figure.

"... Is this Sylvaril? How novel!"

Perugius watches my production process carefully.

Curiously, carefully observes my hand.

Can he see magic?

He can't, but maybe he understands the process.

After all, he's the man of legends.

"Earth Magic can be used in this way too, how unexpected."

"We can make anything by request!"

"Is that so? Alright, when you finished a particularly outstanding piece, I will take it."

We got a customer!

Badigadi has disappeared.

So we should at least secure this pipeline.

"In that case."

Finally Ariel joins in the conversation.

"We also have many fine sculptors in the Asura Kingdom."

She went on to explain how talented and skilled the sculptors in Asura are.

Even going as far as, that if she were to take the throne, what they'll make for Perugius.

Getting annoyed by the conversation, Perugius finally spits out.

"Asura Kingdom's sculptures, are they only made to satisfy the vanity of your nobility?
How boring."

"... Eh?"

Ariel, speechless, but Perugius is relentless.

"Once you become Queen, don't you have more important things to do than make sculptures for me?"

"W-Well..."

Perugius isn't letting off.

"Or rather, you plan on a life of extravagance on your people's back?"

"... No, of course not, and sorry. That suggestion, please forget it."

Ariel looks downcast and readies the retreat.

She stands up and take a bow.

Not the usual charismatic Ariel.

Regardless, Perugius has been too blunt this time.

Does he really hate Ariel that much? Were those cruel words even necessary?

"Wait, Ariel Anemoi Asura."

Perugius stops Ariel before she can leave.

Looking at her with an overbearing glance.

"To you, what does it mean to be king? What does a real king represent?"

"He has... wisdom, but listens to advise of his ministers, and the stature of a king..."

"No."

Perugius stops Ariel, shaking his head.

"I know Asura Kingdom's real king, but, he is not that man."

"Perugius-sama knows King Asura?"

"That's right. Crowned king after the Laplace Campaign, my friend, Kaunis Freean Asura ^[21]."

I know a little about Kaunis.

After the Laplace Campaign, the sole survivor of the Asura royal house.

A great king. He gave direction to the war-torn kingdom of Asura.

400 years ago, Asura Kingdom became the sole kingdom to rule the west.

He was the reason why Asura was spared of internal turmoil postwar.

"Kaunis-sama was a great king. I can't hope to imitate him."

Ariel's words make Perugius shake his head.

"He is not great. That guy is a coward, hates to fight, and always on the run. He's bad at studying, not an ounce of martial talent, and he would always sneak to the city to get drunk and ogle bar wretches. He's that kind of man. Indeed, he never had any ambition for the throne. Yet, he has the most important factor of a king. Because of that, I respect him as a real king."

"The most important factor...?"

"If you can tell me what that is, I will help you."

Ah. I see.

This is a test.

Ariel is being tested.

If she is worthy of Perugius's backing.

"King, the most important factor..."

Ariel places a hand on her chin, concentrating over a spot on the table.

She remembers what she knows of King Kaunis.

But King Kaunis was a fool.

Like Oda Nobunaga?

"Rudeus. What do you think?"

While I was thinking, Perugius says.

"Eh, I'm not royalty, so I wouldn't know."

"Don't worry, just say whatever."

Even if he says that.

King... What is a king?

In fantasy novels, what are kings like?

A great man, head of a country.

So basically a prime minister.

In my past life, I was never interested in politics.

Just the reactions on the internet of politicians, that's about it.

Basically, not even a clue.

"... Someone who uses his own strengths for the sake of country and people."

"Ha."

Perugius sighs at such a bland answer.

"Ariel. Even he gave a better answer.

... But concern for his people alone is not enough to be king.

Indeed. Kaunis wasn't just concerned with his own people. With some help, he managed to pacify the entire Asura.

Strength? Why would strength matter to a king?

You never thought about it? Why did a country raise a fool to be king? Was it really for the good of the country?"

"..."

Ariel looks a mix of sadness and regret.

What does Perugius want Ariel to say? I don't know.

Well, it's fine if I don't know.

I don't plan to be king.

Maybe Perugius just wants to know Ariel's resolution and personality, so he asked a question without answers.

Even so, a king?

What do you want to do, what do you want to be?

"Think it through, Ariel Anemoi Asura... Well, it's late, time to head back in."

With those words from Perugius, the tea party is over.

Seeing a dejected Ariel, with Luke following feebly behind, is particularly pungent.

CHAPTER 10

TURNING POINT 4

Part 1

After a few days, my strength recovers and I return to the Magic City Sharia with Sylphy.

By the time I reached home, the sun had already set.

Although it's only been a couple days, upon seeing my house, I was hit with a sense of nostalgia.

"I'm back"

"Coming, welcome back... eh? Onii-chan?"

Upon opening the door, I see Aisha coming from the living room.

Perhaps not expecting me to be back so soon, Aisha greeted me with a perplexed expression.

"Back already? Did you find a way to save Nanahoshi-san? Or ..."

I pat Aisha's head in reassurance.

A [Wah] slips from her mouth, but she doesn't seem annoyed.

"Onii-chan, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, Nanahoshi will be fine. I'll explain the details. Are Roxy and Norn home?"

"Norn-ane is still at school. Roxy is in her room. Mom...Lilia-kaasan is doing laundry. Zenith-kaasan is sleeping."

"I see, Norn is still at school... Sorry to bother you, but can you get Roxy for me?"

"Yes."

After a bit, Roxy came downstairs.

Was she sleeping? Her hair is a little messy and her face is red.

"Welcome back, Rudi. How did it go?"

"I'll explain now, but before that."

"Wha.."

I pull Roxy into a tight embrace.

I had promised to return safely.

Though she was a little surprised, Roxy circled her arms around and hugged me back.

"I'm home."

"Welcome back."

I'm finally home.

Part 2

I told everyone the events of the past few days.

There was a lot to cover, so I just explained the important parts, focusing especially on the details of Zenith's curse.

Particularly signs to watch out for in the future.

"For the time being, I'll stay in the sky fortress, but I'll come home at least once every ten days."

Let's do this for now.

While Ariel is continuing her plans, Sylphy is also staying in the sky fortress.

She is also planning on doing the same (returning at least once every 10 days).

Not going to class, huh... I suppose it's fine if I just show up for the extracurricular studies.

That should count as class participation.

"I understand, Rudeus-sama. You can leave the housework and Zenith's care to me."

Lilia declared that she would take care of the extra work. Anyway, my report is over and the family meeting has finished.

"Phew, I feel tired. I'm going to go rest. What about you, Rudi?"

"I think I'll take a bath and go to sleep."

"Oh? Should I wait up for you?"

"No, not today."

"Okay"

I walk towards the bath.

Thinking about it, I haven't had a bath for a few days.

As I enter the room, I heat up the water in the bathtub.

I should clean my body first... forget it.

Taking off my clothes, I enter the bathtub with a small splash.

"Phew!"

As I soak in the tub, I can feel my fatigue melt away.

I suddenly realize how tiring these last few days have been.

But, ten days, huh?

My audience with Perugius was only ten days ago.

So much has happened in such a short time.

Nanahoshi collapsing, journeying to the magic continent, seeing Kishirika, aggroing Atofe.

Atofe was so strong.

I don't feel like I can beat her.

It is impossible for me to beat an opponent on such a level.

But lightning magic worked.

If I use it to catch her off-guard, I might have a chance.

I need to research and practice it some more.

At least to the point where I can use it while wet.

What should I do? I don't know.

Should I cover myself with rubber like Stretchman? [22]

Atofe's servant, Moore was strong too.

It feels like he can counter anything I try to do.

Up until now, with the exception of Roxy, I've never seen such a powerful magician.

Thanks to [Magic Disturb] and the prosthetic hand I had managed somehow, but how am I supposed to deal with this type of opponent?

A general strategy for fighting powerful opponents..... doesn't exist, does it?....

Regardless, I'm out of ideas. If only I could become a little stronger.

After all, this is the first time something like this has happened in the past few years.

Reaching Perugius's level is probably impossible, but somewhere around Sylvaril's might be.

But, Perugius's summoning magic, if I can learn to draw teleportation magic circles, no matter what happens, I'll be able to react quickly.

The fact that it is forbidden magic is scary, but that's all the more reason to learn it. Knowledge is power.

And, communication too.

Ariel's ring.

If it is improved a bit then it can be used to send messages.

Maybe it is impossible to use it everywhere, but it might function as a pager.

What else?

It feels like I'm forgetting something...

"Ugh, this always happens."

Now I think about it, I'm always so forgetful.

I would have bouts of inspiration, and then promptly forget about them.

One good idea after another too.

I thought I had a good memory, but I really have too many weaknesses.

Not good.

I'm repeating my mistakes.

I was lucky this time, but what if I forget next time?

If I forget my mistakes, I won't improve.

But, what do I do?

I remember hearing that keeping a journal helps with memory.

"...alright, maybe I should start a diary?"

Not a bad idea.

Experiences, failures, weaknesses, important things.

After writing those down, I can reflect on them.

Determining priorities, stating objectives, deciding my next move.

Feels like this will be a good idea.

I should start writing now.

Thinking this, I dash out of the bathtub.

"But... where are diaries sold?"

After getting out of the bath, I go to my research room.

I reach for the stack of papers on the lowest part of the bookshelf.

If there are no diaries, I can just write on regular paper.

The most important thing is to write things down.

But, just writing is so lonely, I think I'll add something to it.

Though its appearance is not important, it doesn't hurt for it to look a bit better.

I place the stack of papers neatly on my desk.

First, I use magic to make small holes in the paper.

I loop the papers through some rings that I make with earth magic.

Next I prepare three boards and hinges.

I place them in a “コ” shape.

I place the ring in it.

My binder type diary is complete.

The boards and hinges were free. The only expense was from the paper.

What about a hole puncher? I wonder if I can sell this?

I'll write this down, too.

Ideas that aren't written down will probably get forgotten.

Hole puncher.. no, I should write about the diary first.

"What should I write?"

Speaking of diaries, when I was a NEET, I used to have a blog. But, I quickly gave up on it.

If I can turn this into a habit, it'll work, right?

No, I shouldn't think of this as someone else's problem.

As long as I make this into a habit, it'll work.

Okay.

I'll write about the events of the last 10 days.

"...Zzz"

I was asleep before I knew it.

Part 3

I'm in an empty, white room.
I've seen this place before.

Just a couple days ago, when I was teleported by Perugius, I saw this place.
Just what is this place?
I've never wondered this before.
Does this place exist somewhere in this world?

That being said, is there anything I can do about this body?
Fatty, NEET, the body of the me that had nothing.
I don't plan on closing my eyes.
But I feel my irritation swell up.

I didn't feel this annoyance when I was summoned by Perugius.

"Yo"

I see, it's that guy.
A smooth, pale face.
A slight smile like a floating mosaic.
The instant I saw his face, my thoughts faded.

Hitogami.

"Long time no see"

How nostalgic... last time was... two years ago?

"You've become like that already"

Last time he gave me advice was right before going to the Begaritto Continent.
That should be two years ago.

"It's not like this is anything new"

There has been a time when he didn't show up for 3 years.

How nostalgic.

At that time, I was drowning in despair

"Yea, compared to back then, you seem to be doing much better"

Not bad, I guess.

Got married, living a peaceful family life.

Indeed, it is a life that I never would have dreamed of having in my NEET days.

"Being acquainted with Perugia"

Perugia is a truly amazing person.

In my previous life, I never would have imagined I would meet and be respected by someone like him.

The figures I made are selling well, too.

I never would have imagined this level of success in my previous life.

"And to be liked by Atofe"

That's not something I'm happy about,

But that's all thanks to the results of my training.

However, if I didn't learn king rank water magic from Roxy...I might not have made it back this time.

That lightning attack is very useful.

"Of course, that magic is very powerful. I'm sure it would be useful against Orsted, too"

Orsted, too?

"A magic that can ignore Touki and paralyze the body. There's no way to counter it, is there?"

There's no way to counter it?

But, if it's Orsted, he can use [Magic Disturb] to cancel it.

"He is stronger overall, but victory is possible"

No, no.

Most of my magic only have miscellaneous uses, so they can't do much against Orsted without tinkering.

Perhaps I don't have any motivation.
I don't hate Orsted.

"Is that so?"

Say, I made it through the Begaritto Continent somehow.
I would be lying if I said I don't regret it.
But, it wasn't a bad decision.
I couldn't follow your advice on that.

"Well, that's your decision."

What would have happened if I didn't go?

"If you didn't go, your father wouldn't have died. Additionally, you would have (married?) the two beast-clan princesses and be living a happy life."

...What the hell?
Because of me, Paul died?

"Yep, because you were there. Because he wanted to show off in front of you, he got careless."

No, but.
This...

"If you didn't go, he would have saved your mother anyway. Of course, Roxy as well."

How could that be?
The things I did... were meaningless?...
No, but when I found Roxy, she was already cornered.
You're saying that she would've been fine if I didn't save her?

"Yes, even if you didn't go, Roxy would have been saved anyway. Her survival is the will of fate."

How could that be?

What is this fate that you speak of?

"The merchant that you helped. If it wasn't for you, he would have been late. The day the merchant arrived, there was a particular adventurer there. The adventurer bought something from the merchant: a magic stone. But, if the merchant had arrived late, he would have bought something else"

Something else.

"A map of the teleportation labyrinth"

How could something like that just happen to be sold there?

"Requesting something from the Adventurer's Guild, the Gisu that failed to convince the swordsman. Filled with enthusiasm he thought of a surefire plan to recruit adventurers, part of which was to sell the map for an extremely cheap price."

...So that's how it was.

Gisu was selling the map.

True, very few adventurers wanted to step in that labyrinth, but it's possible that there was someone who thought they could conquer it.

And so, the adventurer who bought the map would have went with them into the labyrinth and saved Roxy.

"Yep, he would've met your father at the entrance of that labyrinth and they would have entered the labyrinth together, saving Roxy."

And afterwards, with the increased party size, as they continue to explore the labyrinth, they would have eventually saved mother?

"Exactly as you guessed. Compared to you, it would take some more time... approximately 2 years. They would have just now saved your mother."

I can't believe it.

"But, that is exactly what fate is."

Is that so?

So that would've happened. No knowing what the future holds...

I...It would've been better if I didn't go...

Shit, I should have listened to you.

No, but, that means I wouldn't have married Roxy.

"Yep, she fell in love with the man who saved her, but it looks like he doesn't feel the same for her."

If it were like this, nothing bad would have happened.

I love Roxy.

...But, Paul died.

I married Roxy, yet Paul lost his life. I can't feel good about this.

I don't regret marrying Roxy.

She strives to be a good wife and she's happy about being married to me.

But, if Rinia and Pursena were like this too, I think I would be happy as well.

It's not that anyone will do, but under these circumstances, there's no way for me to marry Roxy.

Ugh, fuck....

"It's already in the past now"

Yea.

There's nothing I can do even if I regret it.

It's impossible to go back.

Right now, I have a happy life.

Perhaps I made the wrong choice.

Though I have some regrets, it's not all bad.

I'll just think like this.

"You sure are optimistic."

Back to the main topic, why have you called me here today?

Or, did you come to warn me about something?

"No, it's nothing serious. Rather than advice, today, I have a request."

Request?

You?

Odd.

This has never happened before.

"Well, sometimes even I need some help."

Hm.

Forget it.

Just tell me what you want to say.

Occasionally, I think it would be okay to listen to your advice.

Up until now, I've been overly suspicious of you.

"What a relief."

Well, since you've helped me so much...

Rather, I shouldn't have been so suspicious of you.

I thought I was being played with by a malicious prankster.

"That's just too much. I'm the Hitogami. I'm the God of Humans, you know? How could I have the leisure to just do things for amusement? I wouldn't hurt people for fun."

Ah, someone like that probably doesn't exist.

"Exactly"

Then, what should I do?

"It's nothing serious. I want you to go to the basement and make sure there's nothing abnormal. If you don't find anything, then that's fine. That's all I want."

Make sure there's nothing abnormal?

Why...

No, I understand.

This time, I'll trust you. I'll just do as you asked and see how it goes.

"Is that so... Thank you."

As my consciousness faded, I thought I saw the faint trace of a smile form at the corner of Hitogami's mouth.

Part 4

I open my eyes.

In front of me, I can see the flickering light of the candle flame.

I can see the moonlight shining through the window.

I don't hear anything.

It's quiet.

Perhaps I fell asleep while writing in my diary.

There was a drool stain on the page of my half completed diary entry.

I'll rewrite it.

I rip out the page and put it at the corner of the table.

Afterwards, I copy it onto a clean page and continue from where I stopped.

When did I fall asleep?

It feels like I've been asleep for days.

As I stand up, something slid off my shoulder.

It was a blanket.

Was it Sylphy or Roxy who brought a blanket for me?

Well, whoever it was, I'm grateful.

"Well..."

I remember the contents of my dream.

I'm to go and check the basement.

I don't understand the reason, but there's nothing wrong with listening to him just this once.

Up until now, that guy has never told me to do something that would put me in a bad situation.

Occasionally, it has been mutually beneficial, too.

Even if he is the Hitogami, he probably felt annoyed by the antagonism I showed whenever he gave me advice.

We might have a give and take relationship, but I should try to get along when he gets in touch with me.

"Achoo... it's so cold..."

As I walk towards the basement, I put on the robe that I had hung on the wall. Though it is already spring, not all of the snow has melted yet. The chill of early spring is in the air.

It's not good to sleep here.

I should get back to my room as soon as possible and sleep on the warm bed. But, in this cold, the bed would be cold too.

Around what time is it right now?

Judging by how quiet it is, it must be late into the night.

If I go to Sylphy's or Roxy's room right now, I'll probably wake one of them up...

I just want to be warm, not erotic things.

I miss them.

This is Hitogami's fault.

If only I didn't hear about what might have been.

No, I was the one who wanted to know. Was it my fault?

My fault, I guess I'll sleep alone.

As I was thinking this, I open the door.

"...?"

Suddenly, feeling a presence behind me, I turn around.

The only thing in front of me is the chair I was previously sitting on. Of course there's no one there.

"Probably just my imagination."

Besides the table and bookshelf, there's nothing in this room.

There's nowhere to hide.

The window is too small for a person to go through.

There's only one entrance: this door.

This room is small, just one candle is enough to show that there's no one there.

The only one in this room is me.

Why did I feel a presence?
There is clearly no one here.

I don't know why, but I still feel a presence.
Weird.
Maybe there's a bug under the table.

"Forget it, I still need to check the basement."

I open the door. As I am about to leave the room...

"There!"

I turn around, again.
No reason.
Just felt like doing it.
Just confirming that there's no one there.

But...

There...

A person...

"...eh?"



A man wearing a tattered robe is sitting on the chair.
An old man.
Deep wrinkles mark his face. His hair is completely white.
His unshaven face gave him a slovenly look.

This impression quickly disappeared.
He had the pressure of a man who has weathered countless battles.
Sharp, slightly mismatched eyes.
His mouth trembled in surprise.

"I...succeeded?..."

The old man fondly surveyed his surrounding with squinting eyes, deep in emotion and thought.
But, as he looked at his hands, touched the area around his abdomen, his expression changed to a self-mocking smile.

"No... I failed. There was no way I could succeed..."

He looks familiar somehow.
But, I can't remember.
Strange.
Who is he?
Paul? No, he's not.
Sauros? But he doesn't have the same presence as Sauros.
This old man is much more cowardly.

"Who...who are you? Unless... Hitogami?"

Upon hearing that name, the man stared daggers at me.
I remember this reaction.
Orsted.
Orsted reacted in the same way.
This part is the same.
But, this man doesn't look anything like Orsted.

"No."

The man shook his head and met my gaze.

A powerful gaze.
I can't turn away.
It's like I'm being pulled in.
Like looking into a mirror, but searching...

Staring at the door behind me, he made an expression as if he wanted to ask something.

He pointed his bony finger behind me.

In the short time it took to move his finger, the door behind me moved.

"!"

Suddenly, I heard a "bam".

What did this guy just do?

As his blinding gaze returned to the still confused me, he said.

"Don't go to the basement. You've been deceived by Hitogami."

"Eh?"

Deceived?

What's going on?

"Wait, before that, who are you? Where did you come from?"

"I am..."

The old man opens his mouth to reply, but quickly shuts his mouth.

He ponders for a moment and then begins to speak again.

"My name is '———'"

Hearing this name, I receive the biggest shock I've ever felt.

The name the man used.

In this world, the only one who knows that name is me.

The name that I will one day take with me to the grave.

A name that I don't want to remember.

A name that doesn't exist in this world.

My name from my previous life.

"I come from the future."

CHAPTER 11

END AND BEGINNING

Part 1

He came from the future.
That's what the old man said.
Honestly, I don't understand what he means.
Certainly, it's not like the old man doesn't resemble me.

"You're... you're saying you're the future me?"
"Yes. I am you from about 50 years later."

The old man clearly said that.
Even if he suddenly tells me that, I don't know whether I should believe him.
But this guy knows my name.
On top of that, I came to this world after reincarnating with my memories.
So I get the feeling it wouldn't be strange for there to be timeslips.

"Sorry, but I don't have the leisure to explain to you the principles of past teleportation magic."
"When you say you don't have the leisure to explain..."
"Sorry for the Hollywood movie-like words, but I really don't have time. Listen to me."

The words Hollywood movie flow smoothly.
In other words, this old man definitely has a connection to my previous world.
...Is he really me?

Those glaring eyes.
There's something gloomy in the depths of those pupils.
To speak frankly, they're the eyes of someone who kills people like it's a mundane thing.
Cold eyes which think nothing of a single person's life.
So I'll become like this in the future?
That's absurd.

It's completely unbelievable, but the old man's expression is serious.
For the time being, tentatively, I'll listen to the old man's story as if he's me from 50 years later.

"There is nothing in the basement."

The old man said that deliberately.

"I went to the basement, and thought there was nothing. And the next day, I heard the words [If there was nothing, then that's good] from Hitogami, and felt reassured."

The old man grimaced unpleasantly.

"But that was a mistake. I can explain it now."

He touched his finger to his forehead as if remembering something.

His left hand's index finger.

Hm?

He has a hand?

"Listen, most likely, there's a mouse in the basement. A sick mouse. Its peculiar feature ought to be teeth like violet magic stones. I don't know where that mouse came from or when it entered there. Most likely, one from the demon continent or the sky fortress slipped into some luggage. That doesn't matter."

The old man opened his palm, then tightened it into a fist.

"The mouse was frightened by you, and ran away. To the kitchen. And then it scavenges through leftovers of yesterday's meal, has died the next day, and gets disposed of by Aisha."

"..."

"Those leftovers are given to a stray cat the next day, and disappear."

His left hand isn't an artificial one.

Is he really me?

Or maybe in the next 50 years, it gets healed using impressive healing magic.

"But before that happens, a hungry Roxy goes down the stairs, and picks a little at those leftovers. As a result, she's infected with that mouse's disease."

"Roxy gets sick?"

When I heard the word Roxy, my concentration focused on the old man's story.

"Magic stone disease."

Magic stone disease.

I get the feeling I've heard about it from somewhere.

Oh, if I remember right, it's an illness that can only be healed with god ranked detoxification magic.

An incurable disease that gradually turns the body to magic stone.

"I didn't realize it at first. After all, magic stone disease is extremely rare. That virus dwells inside the body, and is only capable of infecting the other life within it."

"The other life?"

"That's right, a fetus. Only pregnant women can contract that illness. I did research later on and was shocked."

"Eh? No, but, Roxy is still--"

"She should be pregnant. But enough of that, you did the deed so isn't that natural?"

Roxy is pregnant.

Somehow I'm really happy, but with this explanation I'm not happy at all.

"Mice are carriers for magic stone disease, because a portion of them have resistance to it. You can identify a carrier at a glance, because their teeth have become violet crystal. And the illness spreads to what the mouse bites on. It only infects orally, and the virus doesn't persist for very long. It disappears after around a day at most, and the infection rate is low, and those infected are only fetuses inside pregnant women."

"..."

"The virus grows inside the fetus, proceeds to remold the fetus, and then turns the mother's body into magic stone."

...He's saying that Roxy will be infected by an illness like that?

"If you were to thoughtlessly go to the basement right now and let the mouse out, the next day you'll hear Aisha idly grumble [I found a weird dead mouse this morning], two weeks later you'll be told [A cat infected with magic stone disease was

discovered], and right after that Roxy will come down with a fever. And it will be 30 years later before you connect everything together."

"...What happens to Roxy?"

"She dies."

At his merciless remark, I lost my words.

"Roxy gets a fever and becomes bedridden... You'll understand that it's magic stone disease once you see her feet start to turn to magic stone, but..."

"It didn't get healed? I tried to heal it, didn't I?"

The old man made a sad face and cast his eyes downward.

"I tried to save her no matter what by going to the holy country of Milis, and succeeded in obtaining the chant for god ranked detoxification magic, but... A lot happened on the way, and it took time. By the time I returned it was too late, half of Roxy's body was crystallized, and she had died."

But he quickly raised his face and sent me the fierce light in his eyes.

"Don't be misled by the words of Hitogami. If it's you who has knowledge of the previous world, you should understand that much. That guy is the source of every kind of evil. The last boss."

"But, why did he do that to Roxy?" [23]

"I don't know. Even now. But it should be certain that he's acting with some kind of objective in mind. At the very end, he said that himself... [Thanks to you being an idiot, things have proceeded to my satisfaction.] ...Shit."

Hitogami said that himself?

But, umm...?

"Orsted or Laplace might know something about Hitogami's goal.. But I haven't met either of them for the past 50 years. Most likely, you won't be able to meet them either, even if you search for them."

"Nanahoshi didn't know where Orsted was?"

When I spoke Nanahoshi's name, the old man made a sorrowful face.

She didn't know?

Or could it be that Nanahoshi also...

"I didn't ask her, but certainly in this current era, it could be worth asking her. Even if she doesn't know where he is, she also thinks a lot about these kinds of things. She might come up with some kind of good idea."

"...What happened to Nanahoshi?"

"....."

The old man didn't answer.

He just had a sad expression.

But after a little while, he spoke while sighing.

"At the very end, she failed. And then became depressed, and I failed to support her... And then..."

Nanahoshi didn't return.

And then despaired, and maybe, to herself, by her own hand...

"I got it. Enough of that."

"Yeah, I don't want to talk about it either."

The old man raised his eyes, and as if pulling himself together, continued to speak.

"Listen. You'll learn about this around 10 years from now too, but... Hitogami isn't called Hitogami in this world.

"...What do you mean?"

"The God of Humans, written as Human God. There's nobody who doesn't know the name Human God, but only those who've met him directly know the term Hitogami. I don't know why he did something like that... Maybe just to toy with the people who know it."

...I see.

No wonder there's such an overreaction to the word Hitogami.

So that's a name known only to those who've met him and been deceived by him.

"At a glance, that guy seemed to only speak about things that were for my sake."

The old man clenched his fist again.

The light of hatred alone illuminated those pupils.

Incredible killing intent overflowed, but for some reason I didn't think it was scary.

"Even now, up to this moment, he hasn't told a lie. No lie that I can perceive."

His fist quivered. In the vicinity of the fist, I can see something. A crackling, coiling, purple lightning-like thing.

"Each and every thing has been for the sake of this one time, so that the suspicious you would obey him without hesitating at this moment!"

I felt blank amazement toward the flying sparks, but put myself on guard.

"Don't be tricked! You read it in manga, didn't you? Someone who talks about believing and not believing is definitely lying!"

"Well, I know that, but..."

The old man spoke with a strained voice.

"You don't understand. After Roxy is Sylphy. Heartbroken from losing Roxy, for a little while you'll stop thinking about Sylphy. Sylphy will be hurt and be in low spirits. That guy will manipulate Luke and take advantage of that."

"Luke?"

"Yeah, later on you'll hear from a woman who kept Luke's company at the time, [When he woke up the next morning, Luke acted flustered and started talking about how he'd heard an oracle from God or something.]"

"And then... what happens?"

"Luke gives advice to Ariel, and Sylphy abandons me and goes to Asura. Together with Ariel who failed to get Perugius's favor! From an inferior position, Ariel starts an internal revolt, and loses. Sylphy is killed in battle."

Killed in battle...

So she dies.

"You lose those two."

The old man shook his head while grinding his teeth.

"Yeah, even now that guy's voice when he revealed his tricks lingers in my ears. [You've done well], the feeling of having my shoulder clapped, and that shrill laughing voice... Shit, fucking hell!!"

The old man struck the desk with a thud.

At that instant, purple lightning scattered through the surroundings, lighting them up like it was midday.

The light quickly faded, but a burn mark remained on the desk.

The old man exhaled with a "fuu".

"I'll say it again. Don't believe in him. You'll end up regretting it."

After saying that, the old man suddenly clutched his stomach.

Looking at him, his complexion seemed a bit worse than earlier.

"So I'm out of time... But even if I say this, you probably don't know what you should do."

The old man's face was deathly pale.

Purple bags had appeared under his eyes.

The old man took a deep breath and then exhaled painfully.

It kind of feels like he's on the verge of death.

Maybe he suffers from some kind of illness.

"First of all, hmm, Eris."

When I heard Eris, I felt my brow furrowing.

"I want you to write and send her a letter immediately. Say [Well, I've been a bit unfaithful, but I love you.]"

"I don't love her. It's because of her that I became impotent."

"Forgive her. You're a man, aren't you?"

"..."

The old man grinned in self-derision.

"...Though I said that, I ended up not forgiving her, and was antagonistic with her for years."

"Antagonistic?"

"Time and time again, I was almost killed by Eris. She would chase me no matter where I went, and every time she found me it would turn into a no-holds-barred

battle. Well, she took it easy on me. If she wanted to, there were plenty of ways to kill me. She would make sure never to pick a fight where she'd kill me. On the contrary, if I was ever in a crisis, she'd save me from the shadows. Almost like Vegeta." [24]

'Vegeta'...

"Well, she's different from the prince of the vegetable country. She just wanted to be by my side. She had always loved me. She loved me and did her very best for me... But she's bad at expressing herself, and didn't know what she should do, so the only thing she was able to do was hit me."

Even if he tells me that.
I'm someone with wives and a child.
It's true that there was a time when I loved Eris.
But, that's... in the past.

"But Sylphy and Roxy..."

"Not a problem. Sylphy's tolerant about that kind of thing, and Roxy doesn't think that she suits me, so she'll allow it. Even Eris, if you give her an explanation in advance, will agree. Oh, but prepare to get hit. Because she's that kind of woman."

"Even if you say that..."

"Protect all of the women who say they love you. Isn't that nice? What's wrong with that? A man should be reliable."

"Don't say it like it's somebody else's problem."

"I'm saying it because I was left with no one."

There was a strange sense of weight to the old man's words.
But you know...

"I have a responsibility toward Sylphy and Roxy..."

"If you're talking about responsibility, you have one toward Eris too. She's been persevering for your sake the whole time. She's a poor talker so it didn't get through to you, but the whole time. If you don't take responsibility for her, what about all her effort?

...You'll be condemned by Ghyslaine. In front of Eris's body."

Eris's... body?

"Eris... dies too...?"

"Yeah, to cover me. If I remember right... That was when I had a rematch with Atofe. A serious Demon Lord was stronger than I thought, and I let my guard down."

The old man said that nostalgically, the corner of his mouth twisted.
To be able to be inattentive toward Atofe, just how strong is he? This future me.
It seemed doubtful, is he really me?

"Listen, you must send a letter. If you don't want to regret it... If you do it now, it should barely make it there in time."

"Ah, aah, well, if you say that, I'll send it. But, where do I send it?"

"The Holy Land of Swords. You should have had some suspicions, right?"

The Holy Land of Swords.

It's not that far from Sharia.

Maybe I thought it might be something like that. So she was training there.

The Holy Land of Swords...

"Got it."

"Don't write it like you're pushing her away. If Eris despairs, you'll be killed."

"I know."

I think that I know what kind of person Eris is.

...Or at least, I thought I did.

If this old man's words are true.

She had no intention to dump me, and I didn't understand that.

Now that I think about it, there's no way an awkward speaker like her could write a letter well.

And thus, we passed each other by, which gave rise to unhappiness.

"Fuu"

The old man exhaled clumsily.

And then raised his face with a startled expression.

"Also, I forgot to say something important. Don't oppose Hitogami."

"Don't oppose"? He deceived you, didn't he?"

"Yeah. But you can't win against Hitogami. I couldn't win against him. Someone like me couldn't arrive at the place where Hitogami is."

The old man said that as though mortified.

He didn't arrive at the place where Hitogami is.

In other words, as I thought, that place is somewhere in this world?

"When I realized that, I trembled. I couldn't even avenge Roxy and Sylphy. I worked this hard to defeat him, but I can't even reach him. I can even manipulate gravity, but he won't come within the reach of my hand."

After saying that, the old man pointed at the inkwell on top of the desk.

The inkwell gently floated up, then immediately dropped down again with a clink.

Drops of the ink flew onto the desk.

"I can float in the air and communicate with others over long distances. I regenerated my arm. Not to mention I can even jump through time and fly to the past... Well, this magic is a failure, though."

A failure.

Just what was a failure?

This man is actually right here, right now.

"You probably vaguely sensed it already, but what's called magic in this world is omnipotent. Once you realize that, you can essentially do anything."

While saying that, the old man raised his left hand.

In contrast to his proud behavior, the old man's face had gone past deathly pale, and was now pure white.

Black bags had appeared below his eyes, and his lips were dyed blue.

"But this power no longer means anything. I was too late. When I became strong, there wasn't a single person left I wanted to protect."

The old man's eyes were glaring as always, but the power was already gone from his pupils.

His breath was rough and thin.

"Listen, I'll say it again. I hate Hitogami.

But I can't beat him. There's no way to. I don't have the technique to arrive at his place. In the era I live in, the thing that's necessary to reach Hitogami's location does not exist. So don't fight with him. I don't know what his goal is, but it's fine if you even act servile, just don't oppose him. You'll just get done in by him, with everything still going as he wants.

In which case, right now, before anyone's died..."

The old man's hand suddenly lost its power and fell.

He raised his chin and gazed at the ceiling.

"There are three things you should do.

Consult with Nanahoshi.

Send a letter to Eris.

Doubt Hitogami, but don't oppose him. That's all."

"..."

I couldn't respond.

When he tells me all this suddenly, words can't come out.

But I somehow sensed that this old man was desperately trying to convey something to me.

"Y-You don't have any more concrete advice or anything?"

"How nostalgic. Come to think of it, the me of this era was quite a slacker... Well, of course, I'd like to teach you more details about various things, but... We're out of time."

"You've been saying you don't have time, you're out of time, etc., for a while now. Is a late night anime starting or something?"

"No... It's ending. By the way, don't depend on other people so much. When you first came to this world, in the early days, you didn't merely rely on other people, did you...?"

The old man looked at me as though seeing a grandchild.

Now that he says that, I do get the feeling I've been doing nothing but relying on other people recently.

"Also... Now that I've come here, history should have changed. No matter what I say, it's not necessarily true it will come true. And since past teleportation takes this sort of form, the history that I've walked won't change....."

The next instant.

The old man's eyes shifted and lost their focus.

His arms dangled downward, he lifted his chin, and he gasped with difficulty.

"You... will lead a different life than I did. Just as you always have, you'll have successes, you'll have failures, you'll have times you reflect, and you'll have times you regret."

The old man moved slightly, then fell from the chair.

"Hey, are you okay!?"

I rushed over hurriedly and helped him up... I shuddered.

The old man's body was light to an extent unthinkable from how it appeared so solidly built.

It might be even less than 40 kilograms. ^[25]

What is this, what's going on.

"I... don't think that because I came from the future, I'll be able to recover from my mistakes. This magic is a failure..... There are no do-overs in human life..."

The old man let his blank gaze wander around while putting his quivering hand inside his robe.

"I jumped with the diary as a point of origin... so I brought it..... What I've experienced is written in it..... Do your best... so that you don't have regrets... Don't become like me, and have that guy laugh at you... please..."

The old man's glaring eyes moistened, and he took out a bulky file-like thing from the pocket of his fluffy robe.

It's worn out, but I know it.

It's the diary that I only just made.

Before I could take it, the diary slipped from his hands and fell to the floor with a thump.

But what stole my attention wasn't that.

When he removed the diary, I briefly glimpsed something caved in on the other side of his robe.

Almost as though there was nothing below his clothes...

"What's... with that body...?"

"Hah, it was... incomplete..... My past teleportation... wasn't able to... take my... entire body..."

"Eh, but, earlier, you said you could regrow an arm..."

"I don't have any more mana... Sorry... If only Cliff was alive, the past teleportation would've been better able to..... a little more, here, information for you..."

"...I'm sorry, it's okay, so don't speak."

"...You... have regret... as Hitogami wants... why in a place like this... what I should say... I came to the past, so at least a glance..."

The old man's eyes no longer saw anything.

His words made no sense, it was just vague phrases flowing out.

Before I knew it, the area below his eyes was dyed black, and the shadow of death had appeared on his face.

This is the face of someone about to die, no, of a corpse.

"Ah"

But those eyes suddenly focused on a single point.

He saw something over my shoulder and behind me.

He extended a quivering hand toward that.

"Aah, Sylphy, Roxy... Damn, you sure are cute as ever..."

A single tear's trail flowed down from the old man's eye... the light was gone.

The strength dissipated from his body, and his neck drooped down.

...He was dead.

I turned around.

The door wasn't open.

It had made quite a loud noise, so I thought that someone might have been woken up, but...

On the verge of death, I wonder what phantom the old man saw.

When I thought that, I heard the footsteps of someone coming down from the second floor.

"!"

I went out of the room in a hurry.

Right then, Roxy and Sylphy who held a staff and candle arrived there from the second floor.

"Rudi, I heard some kind of voice and sounds. Is someone there?"

"Is it a thief?"

The two of them spoke with relief after seeing my appearance, but didn't let go of their sense of danger, and were vigilant.

Should I speak to them about the old man?

.....No.

"No, I'm sorry. I was half asleep. I saw a weird dream, and ended up using magic. Looks like I woke you up, I'm sorry."

"A dream so you used magic while half asleep... I heard something like a shout too, is everything okay? Um, if it's tough, should we sleep together? I mean, obaa-chan said [Human warmth is the best when you want to forget something painful]..."

"No, it's fine. I'd probably do something lewd, after all. Sylphy's not back to her normal condition yet, right?"

When I refused Sylphy's attractive proposal, Roxy looked displeased.

"If you say it's really, really tough, I don't mind, but... No, but recently I've been thinking that it's possible, so if you can I'd rather you just limit it to touching..."

"No, I'm saying there's no need today."

At Roxy's words, I suddenly remembered the old man's words.

The old man said that Roxy was pregnant.

When Roxy said [Thinking that it's possible] maybe she was referring to that.

"...I'm really fine, so you two can return to bed. I'm going to sleep too, after tidying up the room."

"If Rudi says that, I'll do so, but... If it's not all right, tell me, okay?"

"We are married, so please don't be reserved. Well then, goodnight."

Sylphy and Roxy said that concernedly, then went up to the second floor.
After confirming that, I turn back toward the laboratory.

In any case, the first thing I should do is confirm the old man's words.

I don't really understand who the old man was.

Was he really me from the future, or was he someone else?

He did something dangerous enough to kill him when he came here.

There's credibility in that action, but it's all so sudden that I can't completely believe it.

" ... "

But I thought.

I don't want to lose those two.

And, I don't want to die amid regret like that old man.

Part 2

After that.

I returned the two of them to their rooms, and strictly ordered them to not go outside their rooms tonight no matter what.

I went around to the rooms of all of the family members on the second floor, and locked them from the outside with earth magic.

I went around to all the rooms on the first floor, and confirmed that nobody was there.

After that, I returned to the laboratory, and stripped off everything on the old man.

"...!"

His body had no stomach.

There was a large hole from his ribs down, and I could only see bone and skin.

There were almost no internal organs.

But aside from the stomach, it was a splendid body.

There was so much muscle that you wouldn't think he was in his late 60s, and scars from his history of battles remained in various places.

There was a welded-like scar on his chest, and a mole in a place slightly different from where mine was located.

From the looks of it, his body was the same as mine.

If I had to mention a difference, it would be that he has a left hand.

He said he grew it... So healing magic also has some impressive skills.

Aside from the diary, the old man didn't have anything in particular.

No ornaments, no staff.

Below the robe was just a shirt, trousers, and underwear.

There wasn't anything in his robe pocket or his pants pocket.

Although if it was me, if Sylphy or Roxy died, I think I'd at least carry around something that belonged to them.

But 50 years, huh.

It might have all been lost.

I gathered all that in the corner of the room, and wrapped the old man in a blanket that was lying around nearby.

Carrying the body, I headed toward the backdoor located in the kitchen.

"..."

In the kitchen, leftovers from last night's cooking had been placed on top of a dish. So he was saying that the mouse would eat that.

In which case, I should dispose of it.

I go outside through the backyard, and went to vacant land in the neighborhood.

I dug a hole there, put the old man's body in it, and set it on fire.

The magic fire burned up the old man in the blink of an eye, changing him to ashes.

The unpleasant odor of burnt human flesh hung in the air.

The smell of my own corpse.

"Ugh..."

When I thought that, I became nauseous, and vomited in the corner of the vacant land.

After burning the body, I made an urn with magic, and placed the old man's ashes in it.

I'll bury these ashes in the same place as Paul.

If the old man is really me, that ought to make him most happy.

After collecting the ashes, I filled the hole and returned to the house.

I entered through the backdoor and went straight to the laboratory.

I set the urn next to his belongings, and picked up my staff.

I headed toward the basement.

I've already opened up my demon eye. ^[26]

The old man said [Don't go].

He said that a mouse will come out, fish through the leftovers, and the fetus inside of Roxy will become infected with the mouse's disease.

Therefore, I have no choice but to confirm it for myself.

Whether there really is a mouse.

If I don't do that, I won't be able to trust the old man.

And if it really is there, I can't leave it alone.

"..."

The stairs to the basement were dark.

I took out a light spirit scroll from my pocket, illuminating the surroundings.

I descended the stairs, took a deep breath, and placed my hand on the door.

"...hm?"

When I did that, in the corner of the stairs.

Among the thin layer of dust, I found something that bothered me.

Footprints.

A mouse's footprints.

Those footprints continued toward the basement, and there were no footprints going out.

I did... not... open the basement door. ^[27]

I opened a fist-size hole in the center of the door with magic, and stuck my staff through it.

I sent mana to my staff.

The image was ice, the scope was the entire room.

In the basement there was manure that Aisha used for the kitchen garden, and there were magic items and such, but I wasn't going to pay that any mind.

"...Frost Nova."

I muttered that, and it was frozen in an instant.

Just in case, one more time.

"Frost, Nova."

The cold was spread completely through the room, to every nook and cranny.

I let the light spirit go through the hole and light up the other side, and peeked through the hole to verify that the room was completely frozen.

I opened the door.

I opened the frozen door, entered, and quickly shut it.

"..."

I immediately found the mouse.

Close to the hidden door to the shrine, frozen pure white, dead.

I could see transparent violet teeth through its half-open mouth.

Teeth that were like magic stone.

I searched every corner of the room to make sure there wasn't a second one, made a box with earth magic, pierced the mouse's corpse with a rod, put it inside and completely sealed it.

I wonder if it would be better to dispose of the body with incineration.

Or if would be better to entrust it to the magic guild and have them study it.

The latter.

If I report it along with the information from the old man that it was magic stone disease, I'll be able to tell whether it really was.

Although in the first place, I don't know whether a virus can be obtained from a frozen corpse.

I left the basement and locked it with a key.

Furthermore, I filled in the portion that had a hole in it.

It seems like magic stone disease's germ doesn't infect through the air, and the infection rate is low, but I don't know what might happen.

For a little while, I'll make this basement a forbidden room.

I returned to the laboratory.

I was wide awake and didn't feel like sleeping.

First of all, what should I do?

What can I do right now?

Should I read this worn out diary?

If I read this, I might understand what'll happen from now on.

But he said that history had changed.

If I were to say like a certain game would, this is another world line. ^[28]

It's a world changed by the me who came from the future.

Even if I read this diary and prepare for it, there's a high possibility that what's written won't occur.

I suddenly noticed the inkwell and the black stains on the desk.

The scar from the old man striking it with a fist full of mana.

I remembered the three things that the old man said.
Among them was one that I could do now, right here.
I sat in the chair.

"..."

First of all, I decided to write a letter to Eris.

Volume 15 Young Man Period Summoning Chapter -End-

Next Volume

Volume 16 Young Man Period Human God Chapter

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Laputa: Castle in the sky reference
2. RX-78GP02A Gundam reference
3. Char Aznable, Mobile Suit Gundam Z reference.
4. Here comes Suuuuuuuushi~ It is true, Shizuka is not a glutton and let slip too many chance to have Japanese foods. Well, fake and miscooked Japanese dishes, but beggars can't be choosers. Tsk!
5. Is that Okonomiyaki? That so-called Japanese pizza, but actually a distinctive food in its own right? <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okonomiyaki>
6. Yeah, that! The japanese food of raw egg over rice. http://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Mushoku_Tensei:Web_Chapter_52#Part_2 .
7. ビヘイリル王国
8. Dashi is cooking broth, a basis of Japanese food, made from kelp and fish, as well as mushroom. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dashi> . It brings a subtle flavour distinctive of Japanese cuisine. Vietnam food also has its type of cooking broth, mostly based on boiling bones, like that but it's not widespread as Japanese dashi. A soup without cooking broth would be flat and tasteless.
9. War of the Worlds (2005) reference More like War of the Worlds (book,1897)reference, actually.
10. She can still use magic stones and ect that contain magic power. Like her rings.
11. ドライン病 (Drain makes more sense than Doline)
12. 時間のスケアコート
13. In English.
14. 幻の都マイオ
15. ガスロー地方
16. Dragon Quest: Legend of the Hero Abel reference.
17. Lupin III reference.
18. TLC
19. 轰雷のクリアナイト

20. ロイド Roid, short for Nendoroid, are small, chibi figures
21. ガウニス・フリーアン・アスラはな
22. A character from a show on NHK, wears a yellow rubber full-body suit
23. TL note: Hitogami has no known gender, I use 'he' for ease of translation
24. TL note: Dragonball reference
25. TL note: that's 88 pounds
26. TL note: magic eye / demon eye, not sure which term is in use
27. TL note: ellipsis + negation is at the end of the sentence in JP, makes it seem like he almost opened it but decided against doing so
28. TL note: should be a Steins;Gate reference

